

ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY

Sundown Café

by Kenneth
Perkins

*Eclipsing His
"Queen of the
Night"*



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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY W E E K L Y

VOL. CLIX

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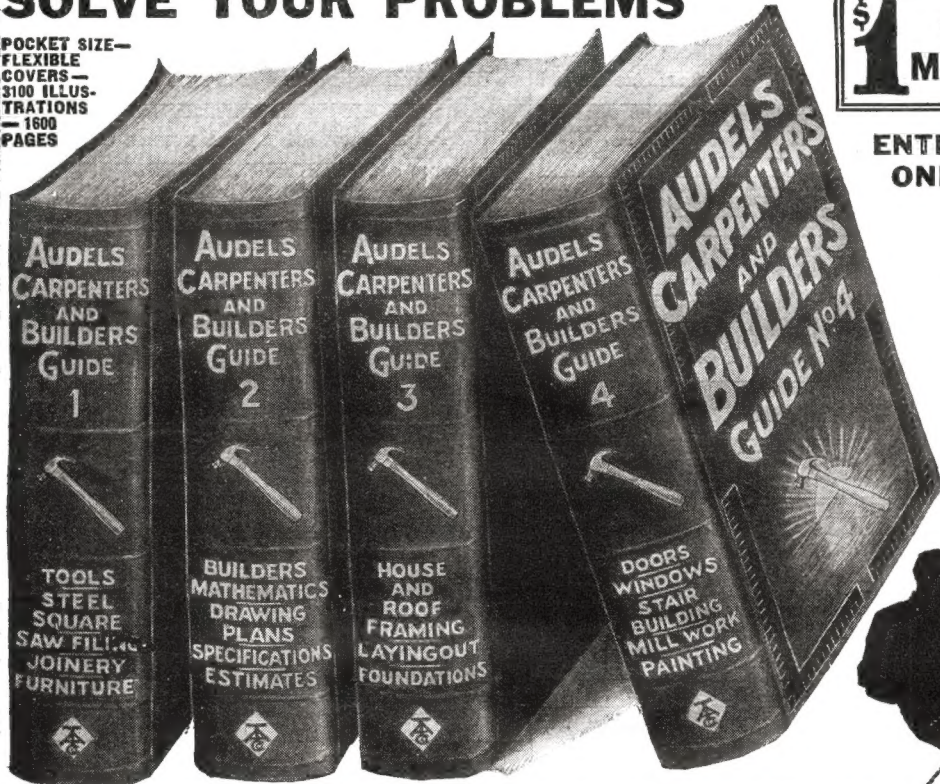
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Classified Advertising continued on page 6.

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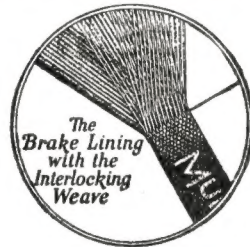
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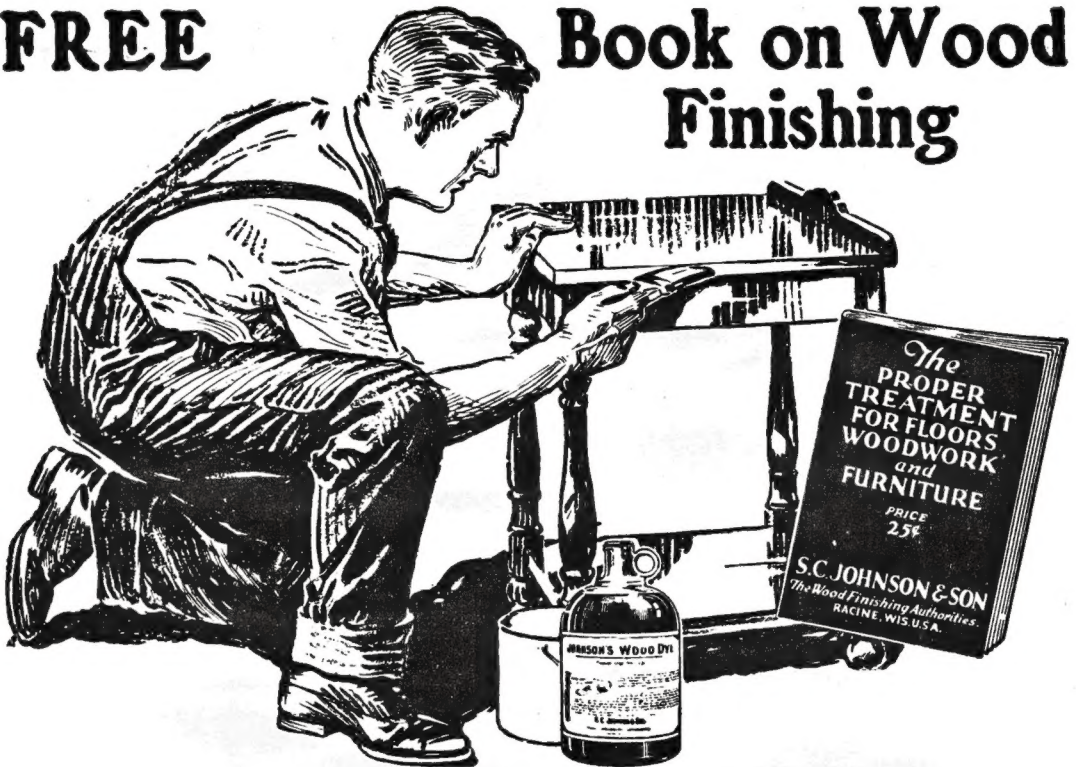
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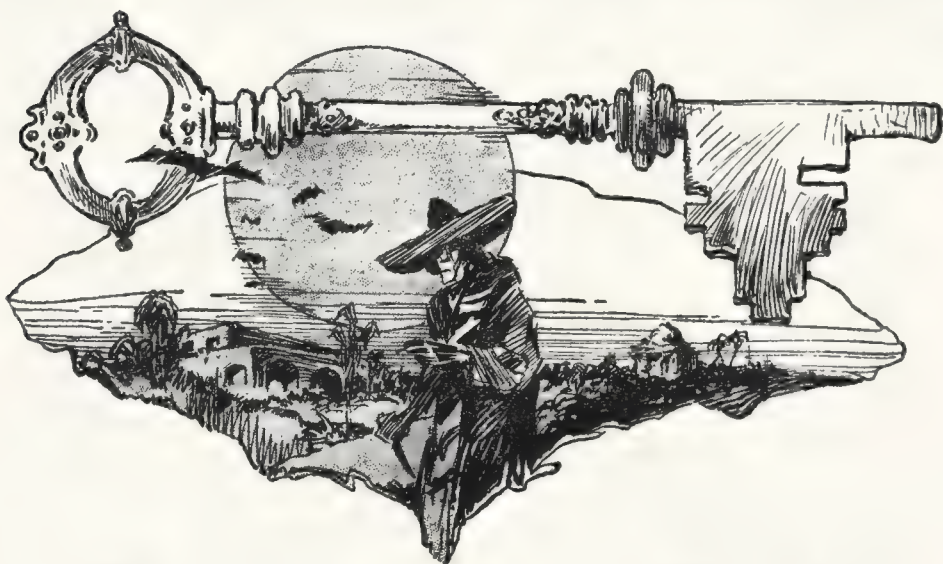
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Sundown Cafe

By **KENNETH PERKINS**

Author of "Queen of the Night," "Desert Voices," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE MULECART AND THE TOMB.

SECLUDED in the grove of swamp palmetto just behind that disreputable sailors' lodging house called the Sundown Café there was a landmark which bespoke a glorious hour of history—an hour that had flamed up and died. It was a tomb with slabs of granite resolutely holding themselves in place despite the crumbling mortar. The iron open work of its massive doors was dingy, green, rusted; the columns of the grim façade were traced with

the mud tunnels of ants, like stiff legs with a plenitude of varicose veins.

There was a bizarre splendor about this old mausoleum on that night when the moon was red over the bayous and the mangrove swamps. It was worthy, in its massive lines and foreboding fortress-like architecture, of the Mexican general who had constructed it for himself. It belonged to the crimson moon, the tepid Gulf night, to the sound of drunk Cajans singing in the ship channel, to the muffled pulse of guitars in the sailors' lodging house, to the croon of the warm wind coming over the cane-brake,

bringing with it the smell of tidewater, of mud flats, yes, and of the Gulf too. It was the heart of that dreary scene—this forgotten mausoleum. It was the habitation of the god of that place—Desolation, genius of the tule flats and swamps. No, the old Mexican general did not lie in the state he had planned for himself. There was a dreadful glory that hovered within that construction—but otherwise the tomb was empty. That once brilliant figure, that personage famous in the Mexican War, General Xavier Oaxaca de Papaquillo had been taken down to Flaxtow Bayou several miles southward and burned before some villagers and the crew of a cattle boat.

But despite the fact that this dilapidated structure was forgotten, choked with weeds and vines, moldy because the sun rarely filtered through the moss bearded oaks to dry the dank sweat of its walls, the place still retained a peculiar grandeur. It was the grandeur suggestive of Cortez or Montezuma. It was a grandeur that withstood the encroachments of civilization which the ship channel had brought to the lonely bayou and the towns about.

The tomb was hemmed in on all sides by evidences of a new era. A cotton press, a cottonseed oil mill, a rice mill and a meat packery were within a furlong. Off there in the turning basin of the channel was a freighter, its masts, funnels and poop deck looming above the grove of everglades. A hundred yards away, in an offing, lay an oyster lugger like a black animal crouching in a tule flat. But this was not all: the ancient tomb was literally the center of a web of freight yards. Every day trains pulled out with half a thousand bales at a time. The Houston & Sabine roared and shrieked day and night. While this little granite mausoleum flaunted the glory of Mexico, the engines of the Texas & New Orleans Railroad shrieked out the glory of American trade. Trains clattered by interminably with their freight of cottonseed, wheat, maize, timber and pitch pine from the parishes of Calcasieu and Vernon, the swamps of Cameron and the counties of southeastern Texas.

In this scene of industry there stood that ancient pile of granite—a tomb of kings.

It came to pass upon the night of this chronicle that a body was brought into the musty precincts of this tope and laid there in the seat of glory—in the council of the dead. But it was not a famous general. It was the ignoble carcass of a mariner from one of the freighters of the bayou who, some time before, had been buried in potter's field, after a brawl. It was a picture fit for the gods—to see a body from potter's field laid away in this sanctuary; but no eyes were given the privilege of seeing it. None, that is to say, except the bleary eyes of old Herzog, the keeper of the Sundown Café—and the half-closed, muddy eyes of the mule he was leading. This grim pleasantry of the Fates was withheld from the eyes of the world with the exception of that crooked boarding house master, Herzog—and his mule.

Herzog himself had stolen the mariner's body from its previous resting place. It was not a difficult thing to do. There was none of the usual horror of body-snatching concomitant with the work of ghouls. For the potter's field of that part of the country was no more than a series of vaults built of brick and mortar, opening upon the air. A hatchet was all that was needed to break down the door. Old Herzog had his hatchet, his little dump cart and a mule. A ten minutes' ride over the sandy trail that leads through the mangrove brush just behind the Sundown Café and Herzog drew up before the tomb.

The moon was low and blood red. There was a continual whirl of locusts starting with a little vibration in the Spanish moss of one oak, answered by a shriller rattle in the swamp palmetto, then by a dozen other voices from cypress and mangrove and willow. Then it seemed that all the plantations round about were infested by that deafening pulsation. But little old Herzog knew the call of the locusts. They did not bother him; neither did the hoot of owls as he thrust a great iron key into the lock of that filigreed, rusty iron door.

He placed the dead mariner—a bundle of rags, skin and bones—on the marble slab which was carven all about with the coats of arms, the glorious acts, the lineage of Papaquillo, of Cortez, of Montezuma.

"There you are now, Grimpen, you filthy chuck of mummy skin! That's where you belong! Potter's field, baugh! I've saved you! I've put you on a throne, b' God! and barring the ants, which I doubt they'll ever come near you, you'll reign here in peace. Your soul may be simmering in hell, but your body—rotten old carcass that it is—has got the best this here State can offer! A mummy on a throne!"

He spat a jet of tobacco juice on the dusty floor. "And remember this, Mr. Grimpen, mate of the hell-ship Orinoco, I done you a good turn! Remember I done you the best turn any man in the world can do to a miserable carcass stewin' in hell. I saved you from potter's field. I did, b' God, and put you on a throne!"

The exultation of the little wrinkled boarding master grew to such a height that he found himself, not as at first whispering in husky tones, but actually crying out aloud. His voice echoed, scaring a nest of owlets from somewhere above that filigreed door. At this Herzog felt himself succumbing to an uncontrollable fear. It was not a serious fear—until he turned his back on that bundle of rags up there on the slab table. Once his back was turned he had the peculiar but very common experience of anyone turning from a corpse: that the thing was moving, sitting up, looking at him.

Herzog crouched, dropped to his hands and knees—and scurried out into the open for a whiff of air.

The air was tepid. The mule, silhouetted against the full, low moon, steamed. The locusts had stopped whirring. There was at that particular moment no whistle from the Texas & New Orleans Railroad, no sound from the cotton mills, no clanking of windlasses or chains from the freighters at anchor off Natchez filter beds. All the world had kept silent before this deed—a carcass from potter's field set in the seat of the mighty.

Herzog felt an audacious and insolent thrill of pride. He had played a very disconcerting card against Destiny. The more disagreeable aspects of his deed did not seem to frighten Herzog. His soul was dragged in that respect—crimp that he was.

But there was one thing that suggested a terrific, overwhelming unbeatable power—something greater than death: it was the sea.

And at that moment when the world was silent, a noiseless wind found its way through the tule flats, over the mud lumps where the pelicans were hatching, through the Spanish moss—a clear, certain smell of the salt sea.

It would be hard to explain why it was that old Herzog could be frightened by the smell of the sea, as hard as it is to explain the particular pet fears of a child or an inebriate, or a lunatic. Old Herzog was a combination of all three so his fears were peculiarly and inexplicably whimsical.

He snorted at the breeze like a wild horse that smells a man, then ran out to the little dump cart, scrambled upon the seat and beat his old mule fiercely. Herzog wanted only one thing: to ride home to the Sundown Café, of which he was the keeper, and seek refuge in the confidence of that powerful and belligerent personality—his fat wife.

CHAPTER II.

THE CAFÉ.

THE Sundown Café was a rambling adobe dwelling with red battered tiles, water-stained walls and a general blotchy appearance as of skin covered with dhobie itch.

It had holes in its façade too—bullet holes. For the Sundown Café was a detail of that plantation and ship channel locality that lent it a very definite glamor. It might remind one of an evil woman—like the inn-keeper's wife herself—who remembers the cicatrices of many exciting nights, an evil woman, glowering and vituperative, malevolent. And yet for a murder it was probably the most picturesque and romantic setting in that country.

The abode was in its present state a sailors' grill. The name, in cordage, was nailed upon a worm-eaten board. Binnacle lamps swung in emparrados. The inn-keeper himself was known as a boarding master. But, so far as anyone could say,

he had never procured a sailor a job. He would fleece one with unconscionable skill, yes, but he had no dealings with skippers. The masters of those freighters that dropped anchor in that steaming bayou and took on their cargoes of maize, cottonseed and timber had little to do with Herzog or the Sundown Café.

The innkeeper's wife, Cora Herzog, was unquestionably the most disreputable character of any waterfront west of New Orleans. She was the confidante and evil genius of her husband as well as the harpy that made life miserable for him. She was a huge woman with small sparkling eyes and vividly rouged lips.

Once the queen of the Sundown Café, her beauty had swollen, her body degenerating to a flabby mass wrapped in a sky-blue kimona. Her garterless stockings crept downward toward feet that were, it must be admitted, quite small—a relic of the old days of rule over the hearts of Creole and Cajan, shrimper and oyster man. Nowadays, however, those once beautiful feet, burdened by her great ham-like calves, shuffled around loosely in a pair of rope-soled slippers.

"Now then, Herzog," she said in greeting her trembling husband when the latter returned from his mission at the tomb in the cypress grove, "what have you-all been doin'?" You've been murderin' somebody. Sure, that's it. You're tremblin' and sweatin' like you was poisoned."

"Sh! Shut your mag, you old bat!" her husband said with feverish eagerness. "I've done nothin' and I'm afraid of nobody! Who's goin' to punish me for doin' nothin'?" He faltered. "Unless—it's some one from—out there." He pointed his gnarled finger toward the Gulf of Mexico. "Some day we're goin' to get a visitor—a sea-devil from out there—who's goin' to ax us what we done with the body of Mate Grimpen of the Orinoco."

"Poor little boll-worm!" his wife snorted disgustedly. "Still worryin' about the sea gettin' you, ay? And after livin' here a dozen years or more?"

"I wasn't afraid of it then. In the old days it didn't harm nobody. I ain't afraid of the water—that is not the water itself.

It's the men. It's these here pirates and thugs that come with their tales, and their prayers and their dead men's chests, like when Tom Yarre and Grimpen and El Gato tore the place down about our ears.

"It was all right before the ship channel brought them mariners up here. The bayou was all right when there weren't nothin' sailin' it but seine skiffs and flat boats. But now when you get these ocean-going freighters and their crews—I ain't had a moment's peace—nights of brawling, superstition, murder! It's the sea has brought all this, crawlin' up through that ship channel which was built by the hand of man."

"Herzog!" Mme. Cora said, exhaling a contemptuous snort of cigarette smoke, there's one thing clearer to me than ever before: you're goin' plumb loco. You're a Texas cowman, that's all! You come down here thinkin' you can run a sailors' lodgin' house on the Gulf, and the very smell of the old tide throws you into a fit."

The dame, as Herzog knew well enough, was absolutely right.

"I want a shot of mescal!" was all he could say. "Shag out of here and let me alone."

But Cora gave no evidence of doing any such thing. "Herzog, you listen to me: speaking of cutthroat mariners, which they're makin' your life miserable, there's a bird in there in the dining room that orter make what hair you got stand up with hysterics. He's a big stew of a giant, barge-man or docker or maybe a sea cook. Which I ain't seen a more villainous cutthroat from the day I married you."

The other evinced no interest, but Cora went on: "Look here, now, you little seed wart, get what I'm tellin' you: instead of workin' yourself up into the D. T.'s over something at sea that can't come here unless it's a tidal wave, you better get down to business and manage your house. This bird has been itching for a scrap, and has frightened all of our customers out the front door. I've been handing him out too much cuevo and he's gettin' red eyed. Now you go in there and show what sort of a man you are by bouncing that sweatin' hulk out into the street."

The anticipation of his duty seemed to bring Herzog out of his trance. Yes, there were nearer, more serious dangers than those intangible fears he felt concerning the distant sea. Here was some work for him to do—some work that might entail bloodshed.

"If he's givin' trouble, why don't you dope him?" Herzog asked petulantly. "Like as not I'll get another knife acrost my neck like when Grimpen was here." Without listening to the long gush of abuse from Cora's mouth he hobbled into the café and hid behind the bar.

Once in this sanctum the innkeeper conjured up nerve enough to pop his head barely over the mahogany rim and to find himself in the presence of a huge red face, pasty hair and sweet smelling pomade. The innkeeper thought it best to lead up to the business at hand—the business of bouncing this peculiar, sweet smelling giant—by diplomatic methods.

"Will you have a drink on the house, pard?" he asked with a sickly smile.

The other smiled back, revealing large teeth.

"You're just the man I want to see," the fellow said.

This retort could be taken as having several possible meanings, and little Herzog was not certain just how to answer. He stammered: "What will it be, pard?"

"I've been lookin' all over for you," the other went on, "and I must say that if you're the host of this here den of cockroaches you ought to be stuffed into a sweat box until you scream bloody murder."

This salutation gave the host his nerve. He had always found that for some reason he could deal with quarrelsome patrons by back firing. "A fine cause *you* got coming in here and making fun of a poor ole man!"

"But just to look at you," the other laughed, revealing two more teeth in his hilarity, "makes me crazy. I never did see such a little wharf rat dealing out liquor from a Mexican jug in all my days on sea or land. What is this poison you're pouring into me? Dope, I'll bet—aye? Somethin' to burn my belly! I suppose you think you can drop me with a little slug like this and then turn me over the port authorities for a stiff, tellin' 'em you found me floatin' in

the bayou? Well, I'll show you how much afraid I am of dope! Ain't no dope ever mixed can drop me."

He tossed off the drink, wiped his mouth with the back of a hairy paw, then waited, standing upright as if expecting an onset of vertigo and sleepiness. He blinked his eyes. It seemed to have the opposite effect; for after belching comfortably, he looked down at the little innkeeper again and laughed.

"What did I tell you, mine host? I can stow away anything *you* give me and feel ten times more like socking somebody on the old button."

Herzog held his breath.

"Now let me tell you why I am looking for you."

The innkeeper stepped backward toward his shelves of bottles, ollas and Mexican drinks. But the other leaned across the bar. He was so near that Herzog got a strong whiff of the sweet pomade full in the face.

The guest went on in a different voice: "I've lost my berth. I'm a mariner without a ship. I understand you're a boarding master. Now is your chance to prove it. You get me a job. Don't care what it is. I'll holystone hell itself if I have to. But one thing I won't do. I won't leave this lodging house until you fix me up!"

The other was nonplused. He stared at his guest in a manner which suggested the fascination of a bird for a snake. All the other lights in that little café were obliterated. It happened that the place itself was empty of guests. They had, as old Cora had announced, been frightened away, every mother's son of them. The lights were still burning, ill-smelling oil lamps that had never been cleaned. The tables were still covered with beer suds; the floor was strewn thickly with a carpet of sawdust, tobacco cuds and butts, with pigeons strutting pompously about picking at bits of rye bread and cheese. The mechanical piano seemed about to break to pieces in an attempt to render "La Paloma."

Cora Herzog, hiding in an alcove, glared like a puma from the darkness of a cage. The sheen of her eyes flashed out green over black.

All these details, however, were wiped

from Herzog's eyes as he focused his vision in an intensity of light upon the rawhide face of his unwelcome guest.

"You ain't goin' to leave, you say? I understand. Well, damme, if that ain't too bad! This ain't really the place for you." A happy remark Herzog realized and he repeated it. "This here is a terrible place for a big, fine specimen of mankind which I see you standin' before me."

"Suits me all right enough," the other said. "And I'm goin' to live here. You ain't goin' to throw me out. No, don't say that. Don't even suggest it. Don't so much as think it. I never get throw'd out of nowheres. Every boarding master from New Orleans to Panama knows enough not to try throwin' me out!"

"I ain't goin' to throw you out, mate," the other said placatingly. "But all as I want to say is something for your own good. Let me tell you a thing or two about this here place. It's making me crazy. I'm slowly losing my mind. Why? I'll tell you: This here tavern, as you might say, is simply soppin' with blood. It was all right in the old days. It was an old Mexican's hacienda and peaceful-like. I bought it and it was a good tavern, a peaceable gambling den, until they built that ship channel and the ocean going freighters come up here nosing right into the corrals of our backyard, which in the old days was for our cattle.

"You can't do a thing like that with old Mother Earth now can you? She gets even with you for changing the face of sea and land! And let me tell you, mate, since we've had sailors from the sea coming here, ain't a night passes but some one gets a knife sliced across their back. Mate, it's horrible! I can't do nothin' with the place. I'm advisin' you like a father advises his son, you-all stay outen here. Go back to your levees or wherever you belong. Get a job as a wharfinger, coal heaver, anything—but stay away from this here hell hole."

"I won't do nothin' of the kind, mine host. Everything you say of this joint gets me likin' it ten times more. I'm here to stay."

"All right, mate, then let me tell you just what happened here in one single night.

It 'll be the truth what I'm tellin' you, so help me God. And if you still want lodging here, all right, you're a great man. You see this here scar?" Herzog bared an ugly whitish wound.

The other looked at it and smiled. "Who done it?" he asked. "A patron? I thought so. Well, that ought to teach you a lesson to treat your patrons proper. I'll have another swig outen that Mexican jug."

Herzog looked broken-hearted. His scar had always been a high card. But he went on fervently: "This here scar was the least that happened that night, mate. Murders! Holy cripes! You'd oughta seen them! It was all about four months ago. A big freighter cast its anchor right out there"—he pointed to a field. "You can't see the water, can you now? That's what makes them ships so uncanny. Looks like they're on their way right up into the Texas cattle country. If you saw one in the Panhandle it wouldn't look crazier. Now that there freighter—the Orinoco was the name of it—"

"I remember the tramp," the other said. "Wouldn't ship on her if she was Noah's Ark itself and not another thing floatin'. Not even a scurvy rat would stay on her—hell ship that she was—Skipper Jarvy—murderous old skunk."

"That's it! He was the one. He comes ashore with his mate and a boson. What does this fool mate, Grimpen his name was—what's he do but get himself knifed. They dress my barmaid up in some old rags from a sea chest and she goes loony. Thinks she's a queen comin' to life from Yucatan and the whole place is like a soppin' typhoon had struck us comin' up the Caribbean Sea! Knifin', throat cuttin' and blood murder! All for the sake of this rotten little wench who gets some silk on her back outen a dead man's sea chest!

"Well, as a result of that night, mate, I get this here slash all but cuttin' an artery in two. Another man gets his belly gored by a bull, another goes crazy, another is murdered with a cane knife. And the damned minx who started it all—that barmaid of mine—runs off to sea with the boson, taking with her the mozo I brought with me from northern Texas. And I've

nothin' left—no barmaid, no mozo and no more patrons—only the port authorities, the sheriff and the floors of every room painted with a nice fresh coatin' of blood."

"Blooley!" the man on the other side of the bar bellowed enthusiastically. "This here is the best tavern I ever found myself stranded at. If I don't get a berth on a ship, well and good! Don't want one. Don't know nothin' about ships anyways. I was only a stoo'rd, and on tidewater boats at that. The Mississippi—that's the sea I've sailed on! But now I am retired. I'm in my haven, yer might say. I'm castin' anchor right here. Goin' to stay ashore for the rest of my days. And this here is the sailors' home which I have chose."

Herzog held up his hands in despair. They were dry, rootlike little hands which looked exactly like the mummified skin of the mariner he had taken from potter's field not an hour before.

"If you're goin' to hang around here," he said with a show of irate bravery, "you-all got to pay for your keep. This ain't a sailors' home, or a sailors' house for that matter, which keeps men on the chanst of his first month's wages."

"It ain't? Well, I says it is."

"Who's goin' to pay your wages?" Herzog asked.

"You are, b'God!"

Now from the protection of the dark, in the portales leading out of the café to the patio, Cora heard every word of this conversation. A part of it disgusted her. A part of it pleased her. That part which pleased her were the sentiments voiced by the big boned and deep chested stranger. That which disgusted her was the part uttered by her husband.

She came from her roost, and assuming an air of extreme hospitality, she addressed herself to the two men:

"Now, then, boys, what's all this dickerin' about? If this sailor wants a job, we can give it to him. If he wants us to pay him, we can, and we will. I like your looks, stranger," she said. "Have another drink on the house. My name is Cora."

The big fellow grinned in much the same manner as a horse who grins by lifting its pudgy upper lip and denuding the front nip-

pers. "My name is Boscoe. Al Boscoe. And I'm glad to meet you. This looks like a good harbor to me. In my talk with this here little muskrat—"

"Who is my husband," Cora put in graciously.

"In my talk with the gentleman," Al Boscoe went on, "I overhears him make a remark which might be so mutually beneficial to us all—owner, underwriter, and charterer of this here sailors' inn: your mozo and your barmaid left you. Am I right?"

"You are, worse luck!" Cora Herzog admitted. "And yet no one was ever better riddance."

"Then I got a proposition to make," Al Boscoe went on. "This place, from the remarks of your husband, is a place for brawls and there ain't no way so far as you know by which peace can be kept. Well, I'll tell you there's one way and one way only to keep peace in a hole like this, and that is to have a man who will sock every drunk in the button who thinks he can start trouble. I am that man. I want a job here as stoo'rd—or as you might call it bein' we're on land—as barkeep. The man that keeps bar had oughta be a bouncer as well, and there ain't never been a bouncer on the whole Gulf of Mexico that can sock a man on the button like Al Boscoe, which is myself."

"You're engaged!" Cora said enthusiastically.

"Oh, for hell's sake!" Herzog objected.

Al Boscoe did not seem to take the innkeeper's objection to heart, for, without another word, he picked his huge weight from the mahogany upon which he was leaning and thumped around to the back of the bar.

"Whose apron is this?" he asked.

"That there," Herzog said, "is the very apron wore by the mozo who went to sea on the Orinoco. It ain't been wore since by nobody."

"You wear it," Cora urged.

Herzog saw the unwelcome fellow wrap the mildewed apron about his huge waist, spit in his hand, wet his hair to plaster a cowlick down as far as his dull eyes. Then with a sopping wet napkin Al Boscoe performed his first duty as barkeep: his arm described a large semicircle over the top of

the mahogany. It was like the flourish of a man signing his name to a contract.

"What's your pleasure, gents?" he asked.

The answer to this came from somewhere in back of Cora and Herzog—in the direction of the vestibule of the café. They turned to see a big shouldered Mexican, with a peppered jaw sticking from under the shadow of a sombrero.

"To kill all enemies of the General Papaquillo—ees my pleasure!" he said, supporting his reeling weight against the arched adobe.

"There we have one of our regular nuisances," Herzog said, pointing his stubby thumb over his shoulder. "Always comin' around teed to his yellow, slantin' eyes, wanting to knife us for not being Mex!"

"My father fought for Papaquillo!" the "nuisance" went on. "By Santa Barbara de Nacozari! I fight *his* fight."

"Bounce him and you're hired," Cora remarked casually to Al Boscoe.

Al Boscoe poured a drink, set it on a platter and came from behind the bar.

"Here you are, Mr. Mex!"

"You like for me to drink?" the hulking renegade asked with a touch of surprise. "You are my frand, I think so! I drink!"

"You'll drink all righto. And when you drink say, 'Here's to the President!'"

The Mexican lifted his glass obediently. Then he looked into Al Boscoe's face, somewhat befuddled. "Dam' to 'ell! I drink to El Papaquillo—who fight the glorious battle—"

"To the President!" Al Boscoe roared, balancing his tremendous weight on his toes.

"*Bueno!* He ees good man, too!" He raised his glass dramatically. "To El Presidente! *Bueno!* El Presidente of Mex—"

But his jaw clapped tight upon the last word. Cora saw. She intertwined her fingers and put them to her heart. It was marvelous. The big Mexican slipped down before Al Boscoe's fist so softly, noiselessly, that even the pigeons did not at first realize some one had joined them in the sawdust.

"It's wonderful!" Cora murmured worshipfully. "You're a prince—a champion! From now on there's goin' to be peace in this joint!"

"From now on there's goin' to be hell!" Herzog grumbled ominously.

Al Boscoe returned and again his huge arm swept the mahogany bar with a semi-circular flourish.

"Am I hired?" he asked.

Herzog looked down at the gyrating arm. He observed that Al Boscoe had a disagreeable peculiarity of wiping that bar as if he were a boxer sparring for an opening. The little innkeeper feeling the insult and the threat of that elbow, knew that there was not room enough for two to remain behind that bar.

Herzog came out.

CHAPTER III.

THE CREDENTIALS OF THE MATE.

AL BOSCOE had found the haven that every mariner looks forward to. He was not yet a man old enough to retire, but he had looked out for a chance to escape from a too arduous life ever since he was a boy. His career had not been quite so picturesque as that of the general run of seafarers. He was not in fact what a mariner would call a deep sea man. His life had been spent on the river boats of the Mississippi, on the waterfront of New Orleans, in the shack camps and the shrimp platforms of the delta, as a cook on a cattle boat, a steward on a puffing stern wheeler that plied between Natchez and Baton Rouge. He had much experience in serving drinks and braining intoxicated colored gentlemen.

At last Al Boscoe had come into a haven. The Sundown Café with the lazy voice of the palmettos and the gurgling fountain in the patio was particularly alluring to a tidewater sailor. He also, through some curious perversion, fancied Cora.

The new bartender of the Sundown Café was in some respects a valuable asset. As Cora pointed out to her husband—if they had had this splendid brute to protect them that night when the Orinoco anchored they might have come out a little better in the battle pitched on that occasion. Instead there had been a miserable little Mexican serving the drinks—a mozo who rightly

belonged in the stables and not in respectable company. Cora Herzog saw in the new barkeep a strength that most women would have been apt to miss.

They got together. It was afternoon. The fountain played. The wind was in the swamp palmettoes, bringing with it an invigorating pungence from the muskrat marshes and mud shoals. There was a setting in that little old hacienda back there! In the vine-covered walks one might imagine a Creole beauty playing upon some stringed instrument while a handsome wind-burned seafarer came to make ardent love. Cora and Al Boscoe did not quite justify their background, but love is the same in one heart as in another. Al Boscoe's intentions, in fact, were of the best, for he firmly intended to marry the woman—provided they could get rid of that pop-eyed, unwashed, nerve shattered, little man—her husband.

They sat at a table in the patio directly below a crevice in the wall which had been dug by the whizzing knife of that famous bullfighter, Señor El Gato of the City of Mexico.

Cora pointed the historical mark out to her employee.

The other did not shudder at it. He had seen knife marks—bullet marks—in fact had them on his own person. This chink in the wall meant nothing.

"I'll tell you where that there knife ought to have landed at," he said confidentially, leaning over his glass of cuevo. "Right in the miserable little sweatin' carcass of that husband of yours."

Cora laughed jovially. It was a splendid conception.

"Look here," Al went on, "I'm a good stoo'd, ain't I now? I know how to mix drinks. I can make a olive float in a glass of jackass brandy or sink or stay in the middle—just according to how I mix the stuff. That makes me a good barkeep. But I'm something else, too. Look at that fist. Ain't that something to be proud about?"

He held up what looked like a chunk of iron with circles of rust and scaly skin that would have made any man pale. Cora stared. Al Boscoe went on: "That's fit

to do something else besides making a olive float, ain't it now?"

"It sure is," the innkeeper's wife agreed enthusiastically.

"Now I've been here just a week and I ain't had any chance to do any sockin' yet—except on a Mex—and he don't count. But have patience. I know how to take care of a place—particularly a place where you have Cajans, Greek shrimpers and Dago winch hands throwin' knives at themselves because a mechanical piano intoxicates them. You need me, lady, that's all. You need me every hour right here behind the bar. I'm the bird you want to be general manager of the Sundown Café. Now this old man of yours with the trembles every time he sees a man come in from the sea—"

"Tht!" Cora ejaculated impressively.

Al Boscoe spat. "Why don't you cast him off? Here I am holystonin' the bar for you and that little crimp swells around as my master. Why should I stand that? Why I asks you, when I could use this fist of mine on his button as well as anybody else's. I'll sock him, by cripes! I can't bear to look at him. He turns yellow every time he catches my eye."

"Like as not he can read murder in it," Cora laughed. He'll dope you, too, the first chance he gets. He has his way, that little mole. If I could get my thumb on 'im I'd make 'im squirm. This here tavern is his'n, and he knows it. Threatens to kick me out whenever I don't stand by. He don't go agin the law, that's the trouble. Otherwise I'd get the upper hand. I'd make 'im hop too, you can bet."

Al Boscoe spat in his hand again and plastered his jet black hair so that it looked like a patent leather tongue hanging between his narrow set eyes.

"It looks to me," he burst out suddenly, "you could frighten that skunk."

Cora looked up, exhaling a cloud of smoke thoughtfully. "That ain't so bad."

"You can frighten him now, can't you? He's got a weak spot, a nerve in his old wobbly carcass that trembles and vibrates and shivers when you touch it."

"What nerve?" the woman asked. "You're getting beyond my depth, Al."

"It's for you to know what nerve it is. By cripes, with you working at my side I could make that little skunk plumb crazy."

"He's crazy already."

"We could scare him so's he would go and stick his head in them mud shoals. He would throw himself into the bayou with fear—betwixt you and me. We don't have to come aboard of him. Hell, no! I ain't lookin' for no rope around *my* neck. When I fight a man I socks him in the button so's his spine gets twisted but I don't kill him. I never kill nobody. It's too complicated."

"I'll tell you what his weak nerve is," Cora said, dropping her voice and leaning across the table. "You won't believe it. I ain't quite so sure that I believe it myself. You don't believe things you can't understand generally, unless it's ghosts. And this I'm tellin' you ain't ghosts—that is not what you'd call ghosts exactly—" she stumbled.

It took a larger vocabulary than Cora Herzog's to give expression to the peculiar things in her sodden mind. Presently seeing the man across the table smiling somewhat condescendingly—as if he thought she was foolish but was willing to put up with it—she went on: "It started that night the Orinoco anchored over there near the turning basin. One of the men on board—a mate, a skinny scarecrow that talked like they do in the vaudeville 'yes, my lydy, y'know,' and all that stuff. 'Comes from London b'gosh.' Well, he gets knifed. The Mexican which knifed him was standing right in that room."

She pointed up to a window barred with rusty filigree. "The mate—Grimpen was his name—gets the blade in his stomach or neck. Leastways he croaks. Now I admit they ain't no ghosts yet!" she snapped out angrily, again seeing the condescending smirk which bared her companion's yellow nippers. "In fact there ain't no ghosts at all—it's only Herzog as thinks there are. That's how we are going to make him crazy."

Al Boscoe shuffled his chair closer. "This sounds good."

"Well the dying wish of that ship's mate with the knife in his stomach was that he

be buried at sea. His skipper, who was here then—drat him for the bloody thug that he was too!—promises to bury him in the sea, but then he tells Herzog: 'Take this carcass and bury him as far inland as you can git. We don't want him pollutin' the waves of the sea.' Goes back on the dying wish, you understand."

"But Herzog!" the other interrupted.

"That's it. I'm coming to Herzog. Herzog turns the stiff over to the authorities of course and he gits planted in potter's field. Ever since Herzog has been kind of loony. Why, I don't know. Whenever he smells tidewater he shivers. He don't shiver from the wind that brings the stench up here, but from the smell of the sea itself. He is scared that there body of Grimpen which orter been buried in the sea won't lie quiet in potter's field."

"Look here, lady," Al Boscoe said confidentially. "I want to advise you something. You're throwin' a good happy life away tryin' to stick it out with *him*! What's he givin' you anyway that you let yourself be stepped on—why don't you step on *him*? Squash him like you would squash a horned toad! That's all he's good for. A little cold-blooded, pop-eyed horned toad swells around as your husband. Thinks he's good enough for you! Zowie, what a joke!"

"A horned toad knows where it's goin'! But Herzog—he don't know where *he's* goin', I'll tell you!" Cora grunted. "I'll step on him all right if he thinks I'm goin' slave my years out here any longer. I used to be good lookin' in the old days. Ask anyone around here."

"You're good lookin' now!" Al Boscoe said, leaning so close that she was thrilled with a whiff of that pungent pomade. A superb impression of unlimited strength, of flattery and sweet odors enthralled the impressionable Cora. "Ask me if you ain't beautiful! If anybody knows a beautiful woman it's a mariner—which is me, Al Boscoe!"

This was stretching a point somewhat, for a riverboat scruffer is not exactly the same as a deep sea mariner. Cora Herzog was not exactly what could be called beautiful. "And yet you're satisfied," the flatter-

er went on, "satisfied with a toad, s'help me! When—if you wanted a real sailor—Look at this arm of mine."

He held up a gigantic bronzed forearm which sent a thrill through Cora as if she had actually felt its strength on her chin. It brought her back to her other train of thought.

"I was prettier before Herzog got a hold of me," she said in a tone of tragic injury. "I got a score to settle with him! If I could get him under my thumb! The trouble is he's so slippery. Always calls in the authorities if there's anything wrong."

Al Boscoe jumped suddenly from his seat and hurried to the bar, which he started wiping with an extraordinary ferocity. He had seen Herzog's little twisted body framed in the arched doorway.

Herzog glared at his bartender with pale, venomous eyes. He had been cudgeling his brain now for hours trying to find a way to rid himself of this horrible animal whom he had been forced to hire. But there was no possible way. He visualized spending the rest of his years as an innkeeper with this monster behind the bar constantly wiping the mahogany and baring his gums in that hideous mocking grin. Herzog had come to one very definite conclusion: he could not discharge the fellow—he didn't dare. He would have to get rid of him some other way.

Worst of all, the new barkeep took a very disconcerting view of the whole matter himself: "It's lucky for you, Herzog," he said, "that you-all took me on as your stoo'rd when you did. There's goin' to be trouble in this sea grill, let me tell you that."

Herzog groaned as he came to the bar, motioned for the olla and whisky glass. Trouble? He knew it all too well.

"Your old woman—good old mate that she is—tells me how you had a riot here some time ago and the first officer of the Orinoco was knifed."

Herzog paled, gulped his drink, and looked up at the barkeep as if the other's ensuing remarks were to be body blows.

"Now I know you think I ain't worth keepin' here, Herzog, but you're mistaken. What could *you* do in a riot, I'd like to know. Get cut yourself. That's about all.

Then gibber and pray and tremble and call the sheriff. Ain't I right?"

Herzog didn't object.

"You wouldn't sock nobody on the button, would you now? You'd poison them perhaps. That's *your* game. But take me now: if I had been here when the Orinoco crew pulled off their revolution within these here walls I'd of had the whole gang stretched cold on the deck and all as you'd have needed would be a coupla wheelbarrows to stow them aboard their scaly old ship. But you shiver and tremble about, whistle for a hurricane—and it's comin', too, a hurricane of the worst trouble you ever dreamed of."

"Trouble! What trouble?" Herzog snapped, finally lifting his head out of the collarless shirt like a mud turtle.

"Yes, sir, when I says trouble, I mean pure hell's fire, that's what! Look here, I understand that that there body of the mate as was knifed was supposed to be took out to sea, shrouded in sail cloth, buried where his soul could rest down there in the bottom ooze with Davy Jones."

Herzog began to break out into a cold sweat—a reaction that could not be hidden. The barkeep saw him wiping his wet chin. Cora, listening to this conflict from her table in the balmy patio, knew intuitively that her husband was being very effectively bested. His nerve was going.

"Look here!" Herzog cried weakly. "What's she been tellin' you about Mate Grimpen's body, I'd like to know. There wasn't nothin' to it—just a barroom brawl. The Mex that knifed him was gored by a bull that same morning. The authorities came. There was nothin' more to it. Dozens of witnesses. Grimpen was murdered, yes; but his murderer was finished, too. Grimpen, the mate, gets planted in potter's field and that ended it."

"Ended it you say! Ended it!" Al Boscoe broke into an uproarious guffaw, then he collected himself, opened his blood-shot eyes on the little turtle opposite to him, and went on in a husky tremulo: "I tell you you poor little bug, it ain't ended; it's just started. That body of Mate Grimpen ain't going to rest quiet in the earth. No, sir! Don't you know anything about

the sea and its superstitions? *You* that thinks you're a boarding master!

"A fine boarding master you are! You ought to be up in northern Texas punching cows. That's where you belong—like you used to do. Or was you only the chuck man? That's more like it. But you listen to me. I've got somethin' to tell you. Until that there body of Mate Grimpen, which was knifed here in this tavern—until it gets took out to sea and heaved by the board like a ship's officer had oughta be buried—watch out for your own soul and for the soul of everyone in this here house. That body won't rest I tell you. It'll turn over in its grave! It'll ha'n't you! It'll bring damnation on the whole crew of us. It'll make us all stark mad."

The effect of this speech exceeded the barkeep's fondest hopes. The miserable little innkeeper seemed already panic-stricken—hysterical, at the possible imminence of Boscoe's horrible prophecy. It was astounding that the thought of a seaman buried in potter's field could wreak such a havoc upon the imagination of that hard shelled rapsallion, Herzog.

A gush of frightened oaths came from the little man's throat; he paled—or rather turned gray, left his glass of cuevo unfinished, whirled about and hobbled into the patio as if groping in the dark for a refuge—something to which to pin his faith in reality. It was a moment—very rare in the life of old Herzog—when he wanted some one to show him the way of truth, how to save his mind from the horrors of the supernatural, the unearthly. He wanted to find the reassurance of a confidante who would save his soul. And so the miserable little wretch went to find his wife.

Cora Herzog, in fact, was the only human being, aside from Al Boscoe, who was in the Sundown Café that sultry afternoon.

"Look here, Cora, you don't believe in ha'n'ted houses and all that, do you? There ain't no such thing, is there? We're crazy when we think about it, ain't we?"

"Pull yourself together, Herzog, and take another drink," was Cora's answer. Her voice and her sentences perhaps were the very touch of reality that the distracted Herzog was looking for.

"Well, let me tell you this, woman: the Old Horny is going to rule this place from now on. We are damned—the whole gang of us! They ain't goin' to be a moment's peace in the Sundown Café from now on. And why? I'll tell you why. It's my fault—poor unfortunate that I am: I went ag'in one of the superstitions that you can't go ag'in without you pay with your soul. I'm done for, Cora."

Cora seemed unperturbed. "Are you going crazy?" she asked blandly.

The other snapped back. "Yes, I am going crazy. That's just it. And it's because of that there body of Mate Grimpen which was buried in potter's field."

"You was crazy long before you ever heard of Mate Grimpen," Cora remarked.

"Look here, you listen to me if you know what's good for you. If you don't want a bash in the mouth you listen good and hard. I've got lots to tell you. Thought I'd keep it to myself, but I can't. It's twisting my brains inside out. It's a secret which you ought to know. It's for you and me that I done what I done."

Cora looked at once skeptical and interested—as for instance a nurse will listen to a child who comes to gossip.

"What I ought to have done was to heave Mate Grimpen's body in the bayou, but I didn't. And here's how we're paying for it: The coroner comes and looks him over. The authorities takes him away and buries him. His dying wish—you remember that as well as I do—was that he be buried at sea. Well, that ain't all, before they took him away I went through his clothes and I found something. No, it wasn't money. Always thinkin' of cash, ain't you? Can't get it out'n your head, can you? No, and it weren't jewels! And it weren't a map to no pirates' treasure. Here's what it was."

He took a wallet out of his coat. It gave the appearance at first of paper money and Cora's eyes bulged expectantly. "Newspaper clippings, that's all."

"Pouf!" Cora grunted disgustedly.

"Yes. Pouf! Pouf all you want, but it's goin' to bring us money—some day. Lookee here!"

He took the clippings out—a half dozen

salt-stained pieces of newspaper, red, yellow and faded tan: "Listen to this: It's some-thin' Mate Grimpen cut out of the Bombay Mercantile News and he kept it by him till his dying day!"

Herzog puzzled out the sentences, reading them in great labor, as a small school-boy reads before an impatient teacher:

"First mate of the S. S. Lyon held for trial. Undue cruelty practiced by Balin Glamours, first officer of the S. S. Lyon, scheduled to call at this port on the 18th inst."

Herzog looked up; realized that what he had read had no meaning in Cora's eyes; and he hurried on:

"The rest of this here article tells what a skunk this first mate was—which it's true!"

"Never heard of him," Cora put in impatiently.

"You never heard of him? Of all the muttonheaded bats—"

Cora returned this sally with a long string of disagreeable names, and then stalked off to the saloonward side of the patio.

"Wait now! Let me finish!" her husband shouted. "You'll admit you heard of him afore I finish. Here it tells how this mate murdered a Makrani. What a Makrani is you don't know, but here it tells—a half-caste stoker. Well that ain't nothin'. He could clear himself of that. But he gets into a fight with a oiler—a A-rab. Comes aboard of him. Is put under hatches. Now here's the part I want to tell you about:

Again he unfolded a sea-stained bit of paper and read the article word by word:

"Mr. Balin Glamours is of the family of Grimm Glamours, of Carmarthen, Wales. He is the youngest son of Lord Glamours and nephew of the Viscount Ravon. The family extends back to the time of Richard II.

"Balin Glamours, the skipper of the S. S. Lyon, is quoted as saying, was the black sheep of the family, having run away to London when a small boy and lived among the disreputable associations of Limehouse. Later he went to sea. . . . His many years of life before the mast. . . . The Marine Board has fixed the inquiry for next Tuesday, the 20th."

"Well, what the Sam Hill—" Cora Herzog began.

"Now wait let me read this here Bombay Mercantile News for the twenty-first—the day after the inquiry!" He unfolded another bit of newspaper and read:

"First mate of the S. S. Lyon disappears. Family notified by the Board of Trade. Anxiety concerning reprisals by Makrani kinsmen of the Bombay water front."

"And listen to this: If this here don't give you a clew to what I'm readin' about I give you up:"

"But it is rumored that the standing of the Glamours family brought about the escape of the mate of the S. S. Lyon. Dustoorie distributed among the proper authorities, so the superintendent of the Board has been quoted as saying, has resulted in the escape. An inquiry to follow. There is great excitement in trade circles."

Herzog folded up this clipping with an important air. "What do you think of that?"

"Think of what?" his wife asked glumly.

"All right then!" Herzog exclaimed in despair. "I won't make you torture your poor old brains no more about *him*. I'll clear everything up for you by reading this here clipping. This ain't about no Mate Glamours, but about that rotten skunk Mate Grimpen which was knifed in our gambling house right here—I guess you remember him?"

"Mate Grimpen!" his wife repeated, adding her own oaths. "Grimpen was it? That skinny, crawling, murderous sneak who was buried in potter's field. Remember him? No one who ever saw those stooping shoulders, those swinging arms—like the arms of a wired-up skeleton—could ever forget him! He came to the end he deserved—the filthy old tom cat! Double-crossed his own skipper; went into a tantrum like a nervous school girl because a bull-fighter waved a crimson zarape in front of his face! Remember him!"

But Herzog interrupted with another laborious attempt at reading. It's a clippin' from some slimy Portuguese paper in Pernambuco. And there's a translation here in pencil between the lines:"

"H. Jarvy, master of the S. S. Orinoco, with a cargo of beef from the Argentine—"

"That's the ship—rotten old tramper—"

Both Cora and her husband cursed volubly at the recollection of its anchoring in the ship channel, of its crew of piratical seamen; of its murderous old skipper, Jarvy, and of that detestable Mate Grimpen. Well, here it tells," Herzog went on, "how the master of the Orinoco takes on a new mate—by the name of Grimpen, properly certificated. Yes, that's all right. Certificated maybe. But the skipper knew well enough it weren't nobody by the name of Grimpen who was shippin' with him. It was that murderous cutthroat who had beaten his way across the Pacific, like as not before the mast; tried his best to get a berth, and failed until he bumped into that hulking pile of rusty iron—the tramp Orinoco. Glad enough *they* were to get a man who could sail a ship, certificate or no certificate! Do you get it? This here British noble who gets into a little trouble for cruelty to his subordinates, ships under another name, comes into the Gulf of Mexico as mate on a tramper, gets knifed by a Mex in this gambling hall of ours and ends his glorious career in potter's field. Do you get it?" he concluded fairly shouting at his wife. "Are you as dumb as you look?"

"Dumb!" Cora snapped back. "Dumb! I'm dumb, am I? *You're* the one who's dumb, Herzog. When it comes to light that this here British noble was knifed in *your* lodging house, then what? A nice little nose full of lead for mine host!"

"That's just what I been thinkin' right along," Herzog admitted with an astonishing show of bravery. "Only I figured different. The mate's kinsman finds him in potter's field—a British noble down here on the Gulf of Mexico in potter's field—wow! But they won't. I've thought it all out. I'm in for a reward let me tell you! I snatched his body out of potter's field and put it where it belongs, where no man in the world can get it without he uses dynamite—in General Papaquillo's tomb. The body's still whole—the air mummified it. I laid his bloody highness in state *I'll* tell you and I got the key."

"Where?"

"Around my neck, by cripes, and no man will ever touch it until I find my way to

make a good little haul. And they'll be pounds sterling, too, I'm thinkin'—not cart wheels nor Mexican centavos but pounds and a heap of them, too."

Cora had had time to recover from her first thrill of excitement and surprise—yes, even jealousy. She had already jumped at the conclusion—before any rime or reason had developed in her brain—that if that body was worth anything she would appropriate that key. It hung around Herzog's throat above the black flannel under clothes as a bather in a public bath house hangs his key by a string around his neck. Meanwhile, it was Cora Herzog's usual policy to disagree with her husband's plans irrespective of their face value.

"So you called me dumb, did you?" she snorted. "*You* call anybody dumb after what you've done!"

"It's a clever trick, I'm thinkin'!" Herzog said.

"Clever, to invite the devils of the Seven Seas to come here and lodge at this inn?"

"Now what kind of gas—"

"Listen here, Herzog: you know this superstition about burying a sailor ashore after he's made his dying wish."

"Yes." Herzog knew about that only too well and he showed it in every lineament of his countenance.

"It means a curse," Cora orated, "a curse from the sea and it'll fall—"

"No! Don't for God's sake. I don't believe in that truck. Don't start it!"

"The curse will fall upon the man who buried him on shore."

"Well, I didn't. It was the authorities."

"At first, yes. But now who buried him ashore? *You!* You put him in that old ant-eaten pile of ruins. That's burial, ain't it? And who done it? *You!*"

"I—I done it!"

"I reckon that's clear enough. Mate Grimpen's body ain't going to rest until it's floatin' in the sea. You can bet your bottom dollar on that. No use talkin' of rewards — th't! Spirits! that's what! Banshees. Ghosts! Maybe a hurricane—who knows what the sea can do?"

"It's all bunko!" Herzog wailed. "You yourself know it. You're the last to believe in the devil."

"We're done for, Herzog. You've spilt the beans! Like as not old Davy Jones himself will be dropping in here as a boarder—or else old Horny in the shape of of a sailor, maybe. That's the way these things happen. Then you'll find yourself in the bottom of the bayou grabbing the ooze with sea-girdles twistin' all about you."

The picture was vivid in old Herzog's mind. Yes, it was all bunk, he knew that—but the sea: he was ignorant of the sea and hence its superstitions seemed all the more dreadful and uncanny to him.

"What can I do?" he mumbled to himself.

"What can you do?" the woman took him up on the syllable. "Give me the key."

"That I won't do. I'm a body-snatcher. I've got to know what's happening in that tomb. If you went there you'd get me into trouble with the authorities. Like as not I'd be sent to state's prison. I keep the key. As for the damned corpse—I'll get rid of it right now. No, not now—they would see me. I must wait until dark. Three hours. Yes, three hours more and I'll take the old mule out there and heave Mate Grimpen into the tidewater where he belongs. *That* will settle everything. I ain't goin' to mix in with these supernatural laws, not me! I'll rid myself of him—to-night."

He paced up and down the patio—an excited, unrhythmical personality, like a frog hopping in an old garden. He chewed at the same stub of a dead cigar which looked like a huge wart on the left side of his mouth, that was a good half inch lower than the right side.

Cora left him, intent on finding how to get that key. She got it two hours later when the innkeeper had fallen asleep from too much cuevo out of that Mexican olla behind Al Boscoe's bar. In her hour of victory old Cora talked with Al Boscoe about guitars and fountains in the patio in midsummer, of how their guests would dance the *contra dansa*, *malagueña* and the Texas Tommy. She talked of starlight and the wine and Havana tobacco. But she spoke not of the body of Mate Grimpen lying in state in the tomb of the old Mexican General Papaquillo.

Out there in the patio, her husband, having awakened from his drunken sleep, was eagerly watching the sunset as a cat at play watches a ball roll just around the corner before giving it chase.

"Why do you wait for the dark, Herzog?" she cried out mockingly, Al Boscoe, wiping the bar with great semi-circles of his powerful arms, laughed jovially.

"Are you planning to murder me to-night?" Boscoe taunted.

"It'll be dark in a half an hour!" Cora shouted in a high-pitched, raucous voice. "Between now and then there's lots that can happen. The devil can turn the world upside down in half an hour."

The luckless, miserable little innkeeper did not return their gibes. Instead he turned abruptly to the stables where he set about harnessing his mule to the dump cart.

"I've got something to tell you Al," Cora said to the barkeep. "Part of it's a secret, but part of it I can tell you and you're sure going to enjoy it. I'm making Herzog crazy and it's like putting your foot on a frog and watching him squirm."

"Squash him!" was Al Boscoe's immediate and earnest advice.

CHAPTER IV.

THE ASCENDANCY OF GRIMPEN.

THE Sundown Café at evening took on its characteristic aspect of a hell-hole at once forbidding and picturesque. A shrimp seine Cajan wandering far from his native mud flat—probably for reasons that only the authorities of Calcasieu parish could tell—sneaked into the café and ordered a *table d'hôte*—Mme. Herzog's famous Creole *table d'hôte* in which there was a strong flavor of Mexican condiments.

Two Portuguese flatboat men thumped in and started a game of cards with a venomous looking Cajan. The long sala—the main room of the Sundown Café—was a dank place with sweating walls and air that was fetid because of the windows being closely shuttered and permanently barred with iron grille work. The four guests added to the general clamminess of the atmosphere by their steaming bodies. It was a

place where even a glass of beer would befuddle your head.

Before the gambling had gotten beyond the apportionment of chips it was quite evident to the guests that a new bully had come to rule in the Sundown Café.

Al Boscoe, describing slow arcs over the mahogany bar with his wet towel, gave every evidence of studying the weight and brawn of the guests with the intent of socking them on the button for any nice offence. The shrimper, unfortunately, was not drinking and having finished his *table d'hôte* with much noise, and wiping his mouth with a bronzed hand, he decided to pick out his own antagonist—which was the inanimate but clamorous mechanical piano.

"*Ah Toucouton!*" he sang drowning out the thumping chords of "*La Paloma*."

"*Quand blanc la yo donne yo bal,*

"*To 'pas capable aller.*"

"Pst!" the new monarch of the Sundown hissed.

The Cajan stopped. "Wha'z wrong?" he asked.

"Don't sing!"

"You don' lak I should sing some more?"

"I just said two words," Al rejoined quietly. "Don't sing!"

The three gamblers laughed politely and there was a note of expectation in their voices.

"Is that something to laugh?" the Cajan asked in hurt tones, "that I, Philippe de Beure, can' sing in this domicile?"

He raised his voice belligerently: the song gushed out:

"*Comment t'a vaillant giabal?*

"*Toi qui l'aime briller?*"

The barkeep shuffled across the floor, a flutter of pigeons at his feet.

The shrimper continued in a sour, reedy tenor until Al Boscoe stood above him. Then he stopped.

"You don' lak for me to sing myself? I Philippe de Beure who has sing in this domicile for many years passé. It's an unfortunate!" He picked his teeth with a bowie knife.

Al Boscoe stepped back and surveyed his victim. The three gamblers stumbled to their feet, overturning chairs.

"Stand up, you yellow livered sea-cook! I'm goin' to mop this deck with your blowsy carcass."

Cora Herzog, standing resplendent in the doorway with the glow of the sunset on her sky-blue wrapper and thickly powdered face, watched these preliminaries to the combat as a lady watching her knight going to battle. What Al Boscoe was going to do to that poor shrimper was glorious to think on. Little Herzog, too, popping his head into the room watched with a pallid, frightened countenance. Probably this was to be the first of a long series of justifiable murders in that café. But half an hour more and he would be ready for his journey to the tomb in the palmetto grove. But in half an hour—his brain could follow that train no longer for something had happened. The Cajan, in response to the bouncer's invitation to stand up, left his chair in the manner of a rattler leaping out of mesquite. His blade flashed, and to the eyes of old Herzog it was a very conclusive murder. But for some reason or other—nothing short of witchcraft—the Cajan leaped directly into the extended fist of Al Boscoe. The knife clattered to the floor with a brilliant gleam, and the Cajan sagged after it, falling with his face in the sawdust.

"When they sing of murder just sock 'em in the button!" Al Boscoe announced, returning to his bar.

Old Herzog held up his hands in despair. Yes, it was beyond the shadow of a doubt now, he was to spend the rest of his life as innkeeper there with this ferocious brute of a flatboat man as his barkeep. Whatever chance he had had before to discharge him was gone now. He might rid himself of the beast by some other method, but discharge him—there was no discharging a man with a kick like that in his fists.

"Let him lay!" Cora Herzog said as her guests surrounded the prostrate Cajan. "He'll come to in a minute. Throw a jug of water on him. That'll do the trick. I guess he won't bother us no more with his singing. On with the piano there!"

Someone immediately put a coin in the slot and "*La Paloma*" was repeated triumphantly.

The innkeeper looked at the sun. It was

a glimmering fire beyond a filigree of palmettoes and vines. But a short while more and the body of Mate Grimpen would be heaved into the resting place its soul desired. A murder had been averted by the merest chance, but there was yet time for the devil to appear.

Cora meanwhile joined her champion.

"If that's all you have to do to stretch a man," she said proudly, "I want to ask you to do it again. It's a sight for sore eyes. Old Herzog has let these drunk water-rats hang around here and run the place to suit themselves. He ain't got guts enough to be even impolite to 'em. Now that there sailor with the little woolen cap and the big red hands and ears—he's been hanging around here and picking fights with everyone for the last month. Never buys a drink. Dead loss to the house. None of his winnings ever gets back."

"He don't drink, you say?" Al Boscoe asked in a loud voice. "By cripes I'll make 'im drink until he rolls on the decks. I'll make him drink so's you can swab out the whole bloody saloon with him like he was a sponge."

He changed his voice, dropping it to that significant call, "Hey, you!" The gambler turned. "You over there with the black wool on your chest, button your shirt and give your order!"

"Give an order for what?" the big boatman asked scratching the black hair on his tattooed chest, evidently puzzled at the barkeep's objection to it.

"Give your order. You're buying something or gitting!"

"Careful now there, mate," one of the gamblers said to his companion. The Cuban sitting opposite the big boatman squirmed, turned about, looked at the barkeep and bared his beautiful teeth in a friendly grin. He for one wanted to be on the right side.

"What's your order?" Al Boscoe repeated, coming from behind the bar. "Drinks is bein' served!"

The boatman thought for a moment then broke out: "Chile and beans!"

This nonplused the barkeep and his face turned palpably to a red hot.

"Of all the damned Mexican skunks to

ask me to serve—" he paused. He felt that he was not handling the situation with quite the equanimity it demanded. "I said name your drink," he repeated with a purring smoothness.

"Chile and beans!" the other roared.

Al Boscoe, without taking his eye off the luckless, beefy man seated there at the table, reached behind for the little olla which was kept heated on an oil stove. From this he ladled out a schooner of chile and beans, placed it on a platter and walked out across the floor. Again the pigeons with a peculiar prescience of disaster fluttered out of his path.

"Here's your drink, hombre," he said.

"That ain't a drink; that's somethin' you eat. Where's a spoon?"

Al Boscoe burst out into a terrific laugh and turned to Cora. "Did you hear that, ma'am? He says this ain't a drink. Of all the yellow-bellied, sheep-eyed kooks to say that I ain't servin' drinks?" The whole room joined in a roar, the Cuban laughing with contemptuous scorn at the luckless and crazy man seated opposite to him!

The sailor took the schooner and studied it. He was apparently perplexed. He put it to his lips and blew on it as one blows upon the rim of a schooner when it contains beer.

"Go on, hombre!" Al Boscoe roared. "You ordered it! You drink it!"

The tidewater sailor looked at the schooner and at the fist of Al Boscoe. It was quite easy to decide just which could be disposed of more simply. He put the glass to his lips and with a gesture of abandon and bewilderment, tossed the burning mass down his gullet.

"Now do you admit I'm servin' drinks?" Al Boscoe asked triumphantly.

The boatman turned scarlet, his neck giving the appearance of swelling perceptibly. No, he could not tell such a lie as that. Chile and beans was *not* a drink, even though he had proved it was.

"I said that there concoction weren't liquor—"

"Then I'm just a plain ornery liar? Al Boscoe suggested with undisguised belligerence.

The third gambler—another mariner of

tidewater craft—whispered to his uncomfortable companion: "Tell him, yes, he's a liar! There's another bird comin' in at the front door which he looks like a mariner too. He'll help us."

The big boatman stood up with a sudden attainment of bravery.

"Yes, b'God, you ain't only a liar, but you're a bunch of rottin' kelp!"

His companion had given exceedingly poor advice. To be sure there was a new arrival at the Sundown Café—a mariner judging from the leather visor on his salt-stained cap, the wide flaring trousers and canvas shoes. But long before this new guest had time to find what the argument was about, the fight was over.

The lumbering tidewater sailor had picked up one of those worm-eaten chairs which Herzog maintained had come from the mission over in Agualegas. But no padres would ever sit down again in that antique for it splintered into a shower of pulp as it struck the back door of the dining room. The head it was intended for—the big pomaded head of Al Bosco—had ducked. Boscoe's fist lifted the sailor's chin like a maul knocking out a keel block preparatory to the launching of a ship. The sailor shivered from his little woolen cap to his canvas shoes and then settled comfortably on the ways. A table was overturned and the hulk dropped into the mass of cards, sawdust, tobacco cuds and fluttering pigeons.

But the group there in Herzog's café did not seem to be as much concerned over the fall of the tidewater sailor as they were with the entrance of that new guest.

In that den frequented by Portuguese, Filipinos, Cajans and Mexicans it was not often that a stranger attracted much attention—unless of course it happened to be some quadroon woman or Creole mademoiselle. This fellow, however, was possessed of a certain air. He was quite tall, with sea faded hair extending down about his clean cut temples in sideburns.

Old Herzog gasped aloud. He understood that air, or rather gave it his own peculiar interpretation. The man had come to shore after many days of hardship, storm and shipwreck. "The devil himself—Old

Horny—has come from the sea. I'm damned! I'm lost! There's no help for us now. I know them green eyes."

It was a handsome face in its way even though it had that Mephistophelian cast, the prominent cheek bones, the slanting eyebrows, the aquiline nose with which artists delineate the devil. But was perhaps the costume of the man that gripped old Herzog's imagination more than anything else. He was obviously a mariner: his skull cap with the black leather visor, his pea-jacket, his wide flaring trousers legs, his shoes rotted with sea water and his peculiar manner of standing as if he were on a deck that was dipping to a deep swell,—these details were unmistakable. The newcomer looked down at the pile of inert and tattooed flesh, and he saw that it was a sailor. He heard the call which comes to mariners to stand up for each other against all landsmen in general and against keepers of sailors' dives in particular.

"That was a powerful blow, my good man. A ripping strong insult must have called for that."

Boscoe's eyes bulged in surprise. Was it possible any man dared to address him in that gentleman's lingo, to call him to account for doing his duty? Everyone there gaped. Even the fallen body of the first man Boscoe had knocked out, the Cajan shrimp, sat up in the middle of the floor smiling blandly and attempting vainly to focus his eyes on a small cloud of gnats hovering at arm's length before him.

Cora, with a woman's prescience, realized that there was a threat of nothing less than murder couched in the mild remark. And as for old Herzog he was the most terrified man in that room. Drunk patrons had never troubled his peace of mind to a great extent. But when a man came in with sea green eyes and with the air of standing with legs apart as if in a storm, then the little innkeeper prayed for his soul. And he also prayed that Al Boscoe would do his duty. Boscoe, it must be admitted, held his own, at least for a moment.

"I am the bouncer," he said. "I didn't like the lubber's looks."

"I daresay! But what was the insult?" the stranger asked again softly.

"Insult? There weren't no insult. Except that he objected to hard liquor—which you might say is a insult to my profession—stoo'rd. No man that thinks he can come into my bar without he drinks strong drinks gets away without a sock in the button, y'understand. Now what's *your* order?"

"Lemonade!" the other rejoined.

The witnesses to this extraordinary meeting of the strange skipper and the barkeep of the Sundown Café saw something then that they would never forget. They backed away, following their first intimations of trouble. The air seemed to hang fire like a cartridge which they all expected would explode any moment. Surely Al Boscoe would return this quip courteous with a good bone-crashing sock.

The man standing before him was slender, with hands that seemed at first sight delicate. Al Boscoe, they were convinced, could have made short work of him. But it was not a duel of hands—those delicate hands against the leaden fists of the barkeep. It was a duel of eyes. It was the muddy, narrow-set eyes of a riverboat steward against the clear, green eyes of a deep seaman.

Boscoe stepped forward, lunging, so eager to deliver a punch that he cared nothing for the balance of his weight. But he caught himself in the very act of hurling an uppercut. There was a glint in those green eyes that made him shiver. The man was bedeviled. He had come out of the sea like a shipwrecked sailor from another

world. Or, what Boscoe thought was considerably more likely, he had a gun in his sleeve and would hurl a string of fire as soon as he had a mind to.

The peculiar thing that these witnesses saw was the picture of a hulking brute becoming slightly jaundiced about the gills, breaking into a sweat, turning slowly about and slinking to the protection of his bar.

Old Herzog watched this combat and he felt the blood freezing in his veins. Who was this man? Why should *he* come to the Sundown Café. Why? Herzog thought immediately of Mate Grimpen lying there in the tomb of General Oaxaca Papaquillo. In the presence of this skipper all the superstitions of the sea began to grip Herzog as they will grip a sailor who is about to drown. He had an overwhelming desire to run as fast as his feet—or rather his mule and dump cart—could carry him and rid himself of that body. The damnable thing could not have had a more terrifying effect on the old inebriate if it had been actually hung about his neck,—as they hung the albatross about the neck of the Ancient Mariner. He followed his impulse, ran to the stable and fumbled in his black undershirt to assure himself that he had the key.

He scratched his breast. His palm flattened on a thumping heart. He muttered incoherent oaths; ran back to the inn; searched out the place where he had slept that afternoon; again fumbled at his breast; muttered, suppressed a snarl of fear.

The key to Mate Grimpen's temporary tomb was not there.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK



TO A WOULD-BE RIVAL

JEALOUS of *you*?

Does the rose envy the onion her face?
Or the wise man envy the fool his place?

Jealous of *you*?

Do you think that I think that he loves you?
I know by his eyes that to me he's true.

When you look in his eyes as I do and see
Love shining through, then indeed will I be
Jealous of *you*!

Sara Gilday.



Totem Signs

By FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

CHAPTER I.

"THE GUN GIRL."

WHEN the problem became too deep for old man Gregory to solve he sent to Nome for Bob MacGregor and made him a deputy marshal the instant his foot hit the dock.

"I'm turning the Jennings case over to you, Bob, and if you fall down flat I won't hold it against you. It's like passing over a plate of restaurant hash and asking a man to find out what's in it. The Alaskan coast is a moonshiner's paradise; the only thing is the lack of population automatically limits their operations. They're equipped with some mighty fast gasboats, too. They've had squabbles among themselves and there have been killings. They have threatened us, too. The last time we had

old man Fleming in court he shook his finger in the commissioner's face and told him he'd never have been taken alive if he'd had half a chance. He warned us the next time we came for him to be prepared to shoot it out."

"Did the judge throw the book at him?"

"No, he didn't. You'll remember years ago Fleming was working in the Treadwell mine and a rock fractured his skull. He lived on Queer Street for a long time and ever since then he has been subject to violent outbursts when roused. The commissioner had that in mind, I guess, when he paid no attention to his threats. Later we sent Jennings out to arrest him and he never came back. Found with a knife wound in the back, and a dead weasel near by. Of course that don't mean a thing. Naturally, we thought of Fleming's threat. We've sent

several men out and they've fallen down. They couldn't even find Fleming. Here's the latest clew, now go to it, and if you can clear it up you've added another feather to your bonnet.

"There's a crazy half-breed involved, too. A fellow named Limpy Ford. He has been in partnership with half a dozen men we have had under suspicion. There's a side to the man that his own partners know nothing about. But Ford knows every cove and channel in this part of the coast and that's valuable knowledge when we get after a load of moon. Also he can sell it to the natives and not get caught. I've assigned a fast gasboat to you and you can have men if you want them, though I know you like to go it alone as a rule. Guess that's all now."

MacGregor thought of all this as his gasboat tugged at anchor while the tide eddied and sucked its way through a near-by reef. On one side of him towered the great snow-capped peaks, the main defense of a mighty continent. On the other side a parallel fringe of peaks nearly as lofty reared upward, a sort of gigantic skirmish line of defense. The fringe extends over a thousand miles from Puget Sound to Icy Straits north of Juneau, and except for the swift tides the water is smooth—a mill pond.

MacGregor fretted at the delay. He had pitted his powerful craft against the tide, but the waters had clutched at the hull with a thousand invisible fingers, and though the motor ran full speed ahead, the boat had been swept back. The marshal lighted his pipe. Man can better reflect and plan when the pipe is drawing well. Rocks that a half hour ago were awash were now covered, but he waited until the tide was with him, then he rushed through the strait with the swiftness of a liner. Several hours later he shut off the engine and drifted, until at length he slipped into a quiet cove and anchored.

It was daybreak when he stepped into the tender and rowed ashore. As he made his way over rough ground a close observer might have noticed a slight suggestion of lameness, but to the average man his progress would have been natural enough. Through a thick fringe of timber he made his way. There was no suggestion of a

water course in the vicinity, except the numerous tiny streams one finds everywhere along the Alaskan coast in wet weather, and yet when he emerged into a natural clearing he discovered a small creek of crystal clearness.

Creeks as a rule empty into coves and bays. This one desiring to be different had chosen a point of land half a mile distant. MacGregor smiled. This checked up with the description of Fleming's new location—deep woods at the end of the strait, creek emptying into the strait at a point of land heavily wooded. He consulted a crude map, then set off skirting the woods, damp from night dews.

Once he caught a glimpse of a deer that fled abruptly at his unexpected approach. He heard it crash through the brush ahead. He quickened his step and dropped behind a clump of brush. The instinctive warning that had served him so well on many occasions had whispered. He waited several minutes, then proceeded silently, automatic pistol drawn, ready for business.

"Stop!"

The cry rang out suddenly, cold, distinct, the voice of one demanding instant obedience, the voice of a woman, for it had a musical note. Yes, and there was a youthful note, too, as if the speaker were half frightened at what she was doing.

"Don't move! I've covered you with a thirty-thirty rifle!"

"Pleasant situation," replied MacGregor, thinking swiftly. He had not counted on a woman. Fleming was a widower, as he recalled. Somewhere in his mind was a hazy recollection of a daughter—a homely, pig-tailed little thing at the impossible age when they run to legs and arms rather than beauty. She had waved a flag or something as he had marched down the dock to board the boat for Camp Lewis and points eastward, very much eastward, in fact.

"Now come out into the open and let me examine you closely."

Apparently obeying the order MacGregor leaped headlong into the brush. Mingled with the crashing of brush was the crack of the rifle. The girl had had the courage to carry out her purpose and fired the instant she sensed trickery. With a half sob she

ran toward the spot and yet she did not throw caution to the winds despite her mental distress. The man might be shamming.

With wide eyes she looked down upon him, half afraid. She turned deathly white at sight of his bloodstained face, then fled the spot.

Five minutes later she burst into a newly constructed cabin, well hidden from even one seeking its location. "Oh, dad!" she sobbed. "Oh, dad!"

"There, there!" he said sympathetically. "I felt kinda queer myself when I killed my first deer. That's why I didn't want you to go out. I knew you'd bring it down—why, what's the matter Edith?"

"I've killed Bob MacGregor!"

"You—what!" Fleming's hands dropped on his daughter's shoulders. "You—what!"

"He—he—limped, and I thought it was Limpy Ford coming to get you," she cried. "Oh, what 'll we do?"

"It was Bob MacGregor, eh? Well, he was coming for me. Somebody tipped him off. H-m! Stay here, Edith; I'll be back in a minute! Pack your things; we'll have to clear out of here—to-day!"

Fleming recalled the time Bob lost his leg. It was a bit of gameness that was typical of Bob, a determination not to die that was a classic when old-timers gathered and said: "I remember when—"

Nor had the artificial portion of his leg prevented his getting into the big scrap. He got by some way, because he was that sort. Just how did not matter. Evildoers rather hoped it would put an end to his man hunting days, but it hadn't. They were learning this to their sorrow. But Fleming could not understand the limp unless it came from getting through the rough ground and brush. Certainly when he walked about the street or in a building a limp was not noticeable.

The girl's mad flight through the wet brush left a plain trail to the spot. Fleming picked up the marshal's automatic pistol and thrust it into his pocket, then he gathered up the silent figure and carried it to the cabin. Strong man that he was, Fleming was panting from his efforts.

The girl held the cabin door open with one hand, while with the other she pressed her mouth with a handkerchief. She tried to look into MacGregor's face, but even her strong will faltered. Then she filled a pan with water and forced herself to the task of rendering first aid. Fleming helped her to some extent, but for the most part he rushed about the cabin, gathering equipment, which he placed in a large pile in the center of the floor. At length he stopped.

"We must go now, Edith; are you ready?"

"But we can't leave him!" she cried. "There's a spark of life, and I am sure I can bring it back. Oh, dad, won't you let me?"

"Well—yes; but I must go! You know where, little girl!"

She nodded. "Hurry, and I'll join you—soon. And watch out for Ford."

"I'll watch out for him," he replied, "and God give me sight to see him first. I'm going to kill him and have done with it."

"No, you mustn't, even though he deserves it!"

"Not even in self-defense?" he demanded sharply.

"In self-defense, yes; but let's hope it will not come to that!" she replied.

Fleming walked slowly away unconscious apparently of the heavy pack he was carrying. He could not figure it out. She fought continually against his getting into trouble and yet in the test she had been ready to kill for his sake. Or was it her own? The father wondered, and unconsciously his hand clenched. Once he looked back at the cabin, then he plunged into the woods.

Bob MacGregor's eyes opened with a jerk. One moment he seemed dead, and the next completely conscious and in full possession of his keen wits. Instinctively he reached for his gun, then realizing he was lying on a bunk, the rest came to him.

"Ah, yes, the gun girl," he muttered, "the little devil had the courage to fire!" His tone was filled with frank admiration, for he hated weakness in any form. "And I thought women—all women—were weak. Well, Fleming got away and I'll have to

begin over again. And I'll have to arrest her, of course, for an attempt to kill me."

A sudden movement near the window startled him. The girl was regarding him with utter relief.

"Oh, you are conscious," she cried. "I thought you were muttering in delirium. Oh, Bob, I'm so glad! Why didn't you tell me who you were? I wouldn't have fired. I don't want to kill any one."

"Little Edith grown up," he replied. Perhaps the last of the cobwebs had not yet left his brain, for he added with blunt admiration: "Lord, what a girl you have grown to be from such a homely little dud."

"A butterfly comes from a worm," she replied with spirit, and yet she flushed, for she knew his words came from the heart, and the surprised admiration was still on his face. Bob MacGregor had been a god in her early girlhood, but his greetings had been such as mature minds of twenty or thereabouts deign to bestow on little children of twelve. He changed the subject to the present.

"Then you did not know you were shooting at me, an officer of the law?" he queried.

"No," she answered, "I thought you were—somebody else."

"Somebody who needed shooting?" he demanded.

"Somebody—oh, don't ask me," she pleaded, "I am sorry and if it is necessary to arrest me I am ready."

"Thank God!" he exclaimed. "That relieves me of an unpleasant task. Tell me this so I can report it. You believed your life was in danger, mistook me for somebody else, and shot when I refused to obey your orders."

His words puzzled her, but she assented. "That is what I thought, honestly."

"You see, I must make some explanation for my failure to arrest your father, and to account for my wound. You must have clipped me on the head as I went down. I tried to dive behind a fallen log. I wanted to reach the cabin before you could warn your father. Would you mind giving me a drink of water?"

She opened a cupboard and found a glass. "You don't believe in totem signs, do you?" she inquired.

"Bunk!" he said shortly.

"I am glad you don't. I don't either, but a death sign was left on the cabin door last night. The sign of an almost forgotten Indian legend of love, revenge, death."

She emptied the bucket and the glass was half filled. "Drink this and I'll run down to the creek and get some more water," she said; "we used most of it in washing the wound."

The cold water refreshed him greatly, but he felt as if he could drink gallons.

"Then your father remained here after I was shot?"

"He carried you in, then left!"

"I wish you would persuade him to give himself up. This warrant must be served, and he has made threats not to be taken alive."

"If you would only give me time," she began, then stopped. She did not propose to tell him her father had promised her not to resist to the point of murder. "If you would just give me time I think I could induce him to wipe the slate clean."

"The commissioner suspended sentence last time," he reminded her, "and—well, you know he has been making moon since then."

"I'll be back in a moment," she said, avoiding a reply to his last statement. Then with a friendly little smile that stirred him deeply for no logical reason, she was gone.

The few moments it would take her to reach the creek gave him chance for reflection. He was glad that arresting the girl was unnecessary, even though she had upset his plans and slightly wounded him. The relief on her face when she saw him regain consciousness told plainer than words the depth of her remorse. That was settled.

Fleming's arrest would be a difficult matter, but he believed that he read between the lines of a promise not to resist by force. If it came to a showdown and they shot it out, the girl could not be considered for a moment. Perhaps if he gave her time she might induce her father to surrender himself. Still there was that warrant and his orders were to serve it.

He glanced at the alarm clock on the shelf. She had been gone fifteen minutes. d

It was peculiar, for the creek was close by and the music of its hurrying waters had almost lulled him to sleep during his period of reflection. Lights danced before his eyes as he walked to the door, but his vision cleared in a moment.

The path led straight to the water. He reeled drunkenly along until he reached the stream. An empty pail stood on a boulder. There were two small footprints in the sand where the girl had stood a moment before. He knew they were fresh tracks because one was but partially filled with water.

A dry rock in midstream was marked by a wet irregular footprint. He could not see what was on the opposite bank. It was not necessary. He understood now; she had feared arrest the last moment and fled, believing, no doubt, he could care for himself.

MacGregor filled the bucket and walked slowly back to the cabin. Now that he was on his feet the desire to doze left him. He bathed his face in cold water, drank deeply, then took stock. His automatic pistol lay on the table. That suggested Fleming did not expect the officer would be called to use it on him, or he would have confiscated the weapon. MacGregor examined it and found the original cartridges in place. An enemy had once slipped in a clip of powderless loads and the trick had nearly cost him his life.

He rested half an hour before making the next move. This consisted of an official search of the premises which yielded a still and the usual equipment, including several cases of bottled product. He destroyed it all, then slowly made his way back to the beach, with frequent rests in order that his head might clear. The last hundred yards through a tangle of brush and devil's clubs was torture.

He lurched to the sand and peered about almost stupidly. The cove was clear, his boat gone. Hardly believing his eyes he searched the shore until he found the spot where he had landed. A fanlike trench where the prow of his skiff had pushed aside the rocks was the only indication a craft had ever anchored in the cove.

"Tricked!" he muttered. "My gun girl has tricked me. Huh!"

Was it his professional pride or his heart that suffered most? He wondered as he made his way to the point. Presently he shook his head.

"I don't think she'd play the game just that way," he decided with sudden loyalty, "Fleming was at the creek waiting and forced her to go with him." Then he settled down at the point to wait himself. It might be an hour or a week before a passing craft took him off, but eventually he would be rescued by some cannery tender.

CHAPTER II.

SIGNS FROM SHORE.

THE Daisy Jane was a battered craft, but like a man in need of a shave it was impossible to tell by appearances. The man might be a gentleman and all around good fellow; so, too, the Daisy Jane might be sound of timber and plank, to say nothing of being swift of engine. She was both. She rode low in the water, thanks to a quantity of well stowed cargo. Her cabin was comfortable and six high power rifles stood in a rack at the foot of a bunk. She was stocked with ammunition as well as fuel. One of the two men composing the crew stood at the wheel, the other was oiling the motor which ran with that sweet rumble suggestive of high speed.

"Signs from shore, Ford," shouted the wheelman, "can't make out who it is, but there's somebody on the point waving a coat on the end of a stick. Maybe it's Fleming trying to make up with you."

Ford came up from the engine room, and as he passed through the cabin he picked up a rifle and binoculars. He studied the shore a moment, a smile playing over his heavy features. He bared dirty teeth in a grin as he dropped the glasses and picked up the rifle.

"It's MacGregor," he whispered more to himself than the other, "MacGregor. I'll get him this time. The last time I had a rifle on him, Fleming knocked it up and—" He lowered the rifle, trying to counteract the motion of the craft by swaying his body.

The other leaped toward the leveled

weapon and grasped it roughly. "I stop at nothing but murder," he cried sharply, "but I do stop at that. There'll be no killing while you're around me. Understand that."

"But it's MacGregor!" shouted Ford, struggling against the other's greater strength.

"I don't care who it is. Count me out if you plan to kill. I'll use my craft for fishing first. Get below to the engine."

The other yielded, but a less courageous man than Markey might have noticed he yielded too readily for sincerity. "Very well," he answered in good English, "I won't kill him—now."

A bland smile on the half-breed's face covered the hate in his heart. He made his way below, limping slightly. Once or twice muttered words fell from his lips and the accompanying motions smacked of strange aboriginal rites long forgotten by the present day native. Deep within his black heart he made a promise—the second he had made that day.

Markey steered a course well away from the point and though his mind was on his work, yet from time to time he regarded the half-breed Ford with suspicious eyes. Something unusual was taking place in the man's life, something he could not fathom. Slowly his hand reached within his shirt as if to assure himself the pistol he carried in the shoulder holster was still there. When he withdrew his hand he left the shirt unbuttoned.

Once when he was unobserved he went for the gun as if to learn just how quickly the weapon could be drawn. Apparently this satisfied him. Finally he placed a pocket mirror in the open wheel-house window. It was placed carelessly, apparently, but it gave a comprehensive view behind. The vibration of the engine jarred the mirror from its place a moment later.

"Seven years bad luck!" cried Markey, as it clattered to deck and brought up against a rail post. But it did not break. He lashed the wheel and stepped forward to recover it. Something unusual, unusual for the Daisy Jane at least, caught his eye. He stooped and picked it up. A woman's hairpin, small, dainty, of the "invisible"

variety. The bow of the craft contained two small bunks by way of fo'c's'le. The hatch covering through which access was gained was not only drawn, but locked.

Markey tapped the covering reflectively with his foot. Certainly it was strange to find hairpins aboard. There hadn't been a woman on the craft in three weeks. He knew because he had not left it in that time, and yet—

Through the sole of his rubber boot he felt a faint tapping. He half turned. A knife gleamed in Ford's hand as he leaped toward Markey. All the hate of the half-caste enraged was in his face. The knife slashed viciously in an arc.

Markey was cool, the glint in his eyes matched the half-breed's as he struck the hateful face with his fist. The breed's feet left the deck by a full six inches, then half sitting in the air, he splashed overboard. Markey leaped to the wheel in time to prevent an inshore current piling them on a low reef.

He had little time to glance back for the next few minutes, as the vessel was running at top speed and rocks spread in a network around them. When he cleared the last fringe the water behind was unbroken, except for the ragged heads of half submerged rocks.

Slowly he made his way to the hatch and with a heavy hammer broke the lock. He was prepared to find most anything below, and yet when the hatch covering was lifted clear he was dumfounded at what he saw. For once in his life he did not know what course to follow; then he slowed down the engine, lashed the wheel and climbed with difficulty into the fo'c's'le.

CHAPTER III.

THE SIGN OF THE TOTEM.

BOB MACGREGOR waited on the point thirty-six hours before a passing craft answered his hail. Having a fair idea of the Daisy Jane's occupation he was not surprised she had ignored him. One or two other gasboats studied him through binoculars, then sped away. A stranded deputy marshal interested them

not at all. It was a cannery tender that not only took him off, but went out of her course to land him at headquarters.

The marshal, Gregory, was waiting for him. MacGregor shrugged his shoulders. "Aside from the fact my man got away, I was shot by his daughter through error and my gasboat was stolen by parties unknown, nothing worth mentioning happened," he announced.

Gregory paced the room nervously.

"Hang it!" he exploded, "I'm not blaming you, Mac, I know you would have succeeded if anybody had, but there is something more than mere moonshining involved in this affair. It is positively uncanny the way my efforts are blocked. You are the third man, the third good man, I have had on the case and the result is the same. Something unusual happens."

"I'm not through, Gregory; I have merely stopped for breath," replied MacGregor.

"I know you are not through, for you are my last bet. If you don't clear it up I don't know who can. And let me say there is a deuce of a lot that goes on we never hear of. Stray bits of news picked up here and there suggest strange things. My men are shot at from the shore; they are tricked and beaten and the game goes on. Let's hear that story again."

MacGregor repeated it. "What's that girl's story about totem signs got to do with it?"

"A lot to my way of thinking. I'm going to bear down heavily on Limpy Ford. I think he's a bet others overlooked."

"Jennings did not overlook Limpy. He began from that angle and just when the trail got hottest, the poor fellow was found with a knife wound in the back, and a dead weasel on his chest. Both had been dead several days."

"Then I feel certain Limpy's arrest is desirable. Now as to the girl!"

"Forget the girl, Bob; you're supposed to be girl-proof. That's one reason I brought you down from Nome. I'm old enough to know Fleming's pretty daughter is liable to prove a disturbing element when we send a young man after the old one. She's sweet and pretty as well as good, but she loves that dad of hers. You see her mother

has been dead for years. You've got a stiff job on your hands what with previous failures that are sure to give the guilty party confidence, and what with the general cussedness of the people involved and totem signs. Now suppose you hit the hay. You got a nasty crack on your head. Rest up a couple of days and then tackle the problem with a clear mind. In the meantime I'll pick up another gasboat for our work, I think the Taku is available. She's old, but fast."

The doctor examined MacGregor's wound, then ordered him to bed for a solid week.

"You pulled through on nerve," he was informed, "when you should have rested. You had a lot of fool luck about it, too, but you are going to take a rest now."

"Can't spare the time," announced MacGregor.

The doctor picked up the telephone and called the marshal.

"This man should be in bed for a week, Gregory," he said, "and he claims he can't spare the time. How about it, eh?"

"Put him on the wire!" The deputy picked up the receiver; the chief's voice came cool and clear. "You don't have to obey the doctor, Bob, but what I say goes. You stay in bed a week, do you understand?"

"But—"

"No back talk. Go to bed. Good-by!" There was a click in MacGregor's ear. The doctor grinned cheerfully, but did not deem it wise to inform him he had arranged it with the marshal beforehand.

"You'll have a sweet time keeping me in bed a week, doc," Mac growled, "I'll get out by hook or crook."

The monotony of enforced life as an invalid was broken the fourth night most unexpectedly. Even when safe in bed, with personal danger remote, McGregor slept lightly. Conscious of danger he opened his eyes cautiously; a bare flickering of the lids, and he was peering across the darkened room. A bulky shadow was moving stealthily toward him with extended hand. He caught the faint gleam of a knife blade. Whoever it was intended to do his work with the silence made possible with a knife.

Mac tensed, ready to leap clear of the bed and reach his pistol before the other could act. With a swift movement he hurled the bed clothing clear and bounded over the foot of the bed. A laugh, low with the note of madness filled the room.

"I got your gun first, MacGregor. I'll get you next!" It was Fleming. It was the same voice he had used in the courtroom when he warned them he would not be taken alive. It was the voice of a man half insane who was prepared to defy the world. MacGregor remembered the stone that had fallen on his head at Treadwell.

"You're taking a chance coming into town, Fleming," he said calmly as he switched on the light; "you know you are wanted."

"I want my girl!" panted Fleming, "want her now! If you thought by locking her up you'd bring me in, your scheme worked, but if you've arrested her for murderous assault, then the complaining witness will never live to testify. Nobody saw me come in and by Heaven I can leave without being seen."

"Your girl!" exclaimed MacGregor, "We haven't arrested her. She went with you that morning, didn't she?"

"You lie! She remained to nurse you, and, you dirty cur, you arrested her. I want her, and so help me God I'll get her if I have to tear the jail down stick by stick, stone by stone. She's like a bird, beautiful and free, and she's not going to rot in a dirty cage."

"Just a minute! Now listen, Fleming. Your girl went down to the creek for water and did not come back. I found the pail and concluded she had joined you." MacGregor was calm though he had a lively realization of his dire peril.

"You lie!"

"I'll prove it! Keep the knife at my back if you wish. I'll call up the jail."

"Any crooked work and you'll get it." Fleming pressed the knife blade against MacGregor. Only a thin nightshirt separated blade and flesh. After some delay Mac got the jail on the telephone.

"Would you mind giving me a list of the female prisoners?" he said. Then he passed the receiver over to Fleming. Three

names came to the father, but Edith Fleming was not one of them. Even then he was suspicious. He returned the receiver to the hook and there was a moment MacGregor might have overpowered him, but he did not.

"Fleming," he said at last, "what do you know of Limpy Ford? Who killed Jennings? Perhaps if these questions are answered then we can find your daughter. I am with you heart and soul."

"I'll find her!" the other snarled, "believe me, I'll find her. And I'll kill, yes if there's harm come to her I'll slash him to ribbons with this knife and I'll burn him by degrees at the stake." The glitter of insanity seemed literally to leap from his eyes, and the knuckles of his hand stood out white beneath the skin as he clenched the knife. "I'm going!" he announced.

"Let me help you. Let's settle this thing together. Don't forget I've known Edith for years, that I—"

A heavy tread sounded on the stairs and the door burst open as the marshal bounded into the room. He had drawn his automatic instinctively. Fleming leaped half the length of the floor and plunged head first through the window carrying a part of the sash and considerable glass with him.

"Halt or I'll fire!"

The fugitive struggled to his feet and raced madly for the shelter of the nearest building.

"Halt!" shouted the marshal again, then the pistol cracked. A suppressed cry came from below. MacGregor switched off the light before he peered out. The man down there might not be dead and with a light at their backs they would make fine targets.

"I winged him," shouted Gregory, "hated to do it, but if he'd got behind that building he would have been gone. Come down and help carry him in." Both officers had forgotten doctor's orders.

"Gimme a chance to find her!" pleaded Fleming when they reached him. "why did you shoot? God help her now! You fiends!" He was snarling in his anguish. The marshal slipped on handcuffs as a matter of precaution, then with MacGregor's help carried him into the deputy's room, and telephoned for a doctor.

Gregory was an old timer in the man hunting business. Therefore he lost no time in going over the ground, searching for possible objects of interest. Beneath the window he found the knife Fleming had dropped. The shaft of white light from his electric torch disclosed a pool of blood near a building and close at hand an automatic pistol. The weapon had not been discharged. He showed them to the wounded man with the terse query, "These yours?"

Fleming nodded. "Carried the gun and knife for years."

"Ah, yes, how'd you break the point of the knife off?"

"Don't remember!" A look of suspicion flashed in his eyes and instantly he refused to talk.

While the doctor was binding up a bad wound, Gregory called his deputy into an adjoining room and placed the knife on the table. "You heard Fleming admit the knife was his? Very well." From his billbook he took a small bit of folded paper, tied with thread. This he opened and a fine bit of steel dropped to the table. Gregory placed the steel against the point of the knife. It fitted perfectly. "There's the broken point to Fleming's knife and the broken bit was found embedded in Jennings's rib at the coroner's autopsy. I guess, Mac, that clears up the Jennings case, eh? I shall take the necessary steps to push the charge immediately."

"It looks that way, sir, but there are a number of other things to be cleared up and with your permission, I'll go ahead. I have an idea that Fleming will plead not guilty and there's a chance that he is not guilty."

"Don't forget two things. Fleming threatened never to be taken alive and hurled the defiance in open court. Secondly, Jennings was on his way to arrest Fleming when he was killed."

"Good circumstantial evidence, Gregory, and if I were on a jury I'd put two and two together and find it made four no doubt, but I'd like to investigate a bit."

"Certainly, go ahead."

MacGregor gathered his equipment together and kept from sight as long as the

doctor remained. His week in bed was far from over, but he rather hoped in the general excitement it would be forgotten. He found a chance to talk with Fleming alone several minutes later.

"So they're going to hang the Jennings murder on me?" said the man bitterly, when MacGregor had outlined the situation. "Well, it looks bad. No, I don't know who killed him. I don't care much. If they don't get me on one thing, it'll be on another."

"I want to find Edith!"

"She's probably dead by now. She'd die by her own hand, you see she's that kind. If you'd have given me my freedom I'd have avenged her, but you didn't."

"I want to find her!" persisted MacGregor. "If she is dead I want to deal with the responsible party." His eyes narrowed as he added: "in my own way."

"Then find Limpy Ford!"

"Did he kill Jennings?" demanded MacGregor unexpectedly.

"How do I know? I didn't kill him and I don't care how much evidence you've got against me. What's more I'll never hang! That's a disgrace and I've got—aw, what's the use of chewing the fat?"

"Want an attorney?"

"No. I can say I'm not guilty as well as an attorney can and I can say it cheaper. Don't talk any more. My wound hurts all over. Watch out for Limpy. He'll most likely find you before you find him. And another thing—no, guess I won't talk any more."

Nor would he talk. For some reason he crawled into a shell of silence. Reluctantly MacGregor departed, but he returned five minutes later. "One more question, Fleming; you don't happen to know who took my gasboat, and why?"

"Yes, I know who took it and why, but don't bother with that now. Limpy will keep your hands full and the gasboat has nothing to do with it. Tell the doctor to come in quick, I feel queer inside."

MacGregor hurried to the room below where the doctor and marshal were chatting. Even as they responded to MacGregor's call, the night was made hideous by a cry from the room above. The three men

raced up the stairs to find Fleming unconscious. Blood was streaming from a wound over the heart in small gushes with each heart-beat. On the man's breast was a dead weasel. As the doctor bent over Fleming the marshal picked up the animal.

"Say, Mac," he cried, "what do you make of this. The thing is still warm."

"I am wondering if it isn't some sign of the totem that Edith Fleming mentioned."

Gregory nodded. "Follow me," he ordered. Again he had drawn his gun. Outside they separated and searched every building, but the silent visitor had left not a trace of his call except a knife wound and the dead weasel.

MacGregor hurried to the waterfront intent on observing any sudden departure in that quarter. The bay and channel glistened in the light of a gray dawn, the small craft were still and dark except for their riding lights. He watched until sunrise without result.

"Limpy Ford is the answer if answer there is," he reflected. "Well, here goes. Hello, what's this?" There were two bunks in the Taku's cabin, and on his bunk there lay a dead robin. It was uncanny and the deputy shuddered slightly as he examined the bird. Then he tossed it through a porthole. "I'm going to clear out and get to the bottom of this," he growled, "and get it before it gets me. It's a new experience, but it has interesting and unusual angles."

CHAPTER IV.

THE DESERTED GASBOAT.

THERE were two redeeming angles to the otherwise worthless life of Pete Markey. He would not kill, except as his moonshine frequently sickened men unto death. Nor could he ever bring himself to mistreat a woman. Any native might beat his squaw or a white brute insult a girl and he would never lift a hand. It was none of his affair. Yet he would not do such things himself.

Thus when he peered into the gasboat's fo'c's'le and saw the form of a girl stretched

out he was curious as to her method of boarding the craft rather than whether she was alive or dead. It was dark and smelly in the narrow compartment and the heavy air suggested she had died of suffocation perhaps. He tied a line about her and hauled the limp form to the deck.

"Fleming's girl!" he exclaimed. "What's she doing here?"

Not knowing just what to do he filled a bucket with cold salt water and drenched her. The shock caused a strange gasping. It reminded him of a fish out of water and he regarded the process of respiration with interest.

The eyes she presently opened were filled with terror. She struggled desperately to stand, each time dropping down to the deck with a discouraged sob. At length she got to her knees and attempted to throw herself overboard.

He pulled her back. "You don't want to do that!" he said.

"Oh, let me die. There's no escape. Let me get it over with."

"No escape from what?" he inquired.

"From Limpy Ford. He is in league with the devil himself. He—"

"He's joined the devil by this time," interrupted Markey, "I saw a hairpin on deck and wondered how it got there. Limpy slashed at me with a knife. I knocked him overboard. He's drowned now—drifting below the surface among the crabs and devil fish. They're probably eating off'n—"

"Don't be so morbid," she exclaimed. With a tired sigh she leaned against the deck house.

"I remember now," she said several minutes later, "the trip to the creek for water, then two hands reaching from a clump of brush and choking me. Then darkness! After that I felt as if I were slowly choking to death. I felt the ribs of a boat with my hands, then the ladder and realized where I was. Yes, I remember seeing Limpy Ford, too; his filthy teeth and glaring eyes. How far have we gone from home?"

Markey did not reply at first. "I don't see how he got you aboard. I was in the cabin most of the morning and I didn't go to sleep unless it was that time my pipe fell out of my mouth. He must have come

aboard without noise. He always was a sneaky devil, but he knew channels and how to get away from government boats. Oh, well."

"How far are we from my home?" the girl again demanded. "I must go back, there is an injured man there—Bob MacGregor."

"He was on the beach so he couldn't have been hurt much. Limpy was going to pick him off, but I won't be mixed up in a killing, except in self defense. Don't tell anybody about me throwing Limpy overboard. I wouldn't have told even you, except there was so much fright in your eyes I figured it would make you feel better. I'm going to take the gasboat up to the—well, to the place where I hang out. I'll unload it, then take you to town if that's where you want to go."

"Can you take me to my father now?" she inquired.

He shook his head. "I'm afraid to stay around here. If MacGregor is on the beach other deputies are likely to be around. I hear they try to prove manslaughter on moonshiners now and that means McNeil Island. No, I'll get rid of my stuff and bring you back late to-morrow night. You needn't be afraid of me."

"I am not. Dad has mentioned you."

The strange man once more started the motor running at top speed. The girl locked herself in the cabin and changed into dry garments. The bucket of water Markey tossed so generously in the process of reviving her had thoroughly drenched her clothing.

When she again came on deck the Daisy Jane was moving swiftly through a strait and heading into a cove the girl had never seen before. She glanced behind. It was almost as if the launch had come through solid rock for the waterway astern was entirely hidden. Unless a small boat followed the shore line closely the cove never would be discovered. It was a pretty spot, the counterpart of thousands of others along the Alaskan coast line. Shrouded in eternal mystery, inviting exploration, yet rarely visited.

The girl experienced a thrill at the beauty of it all, then a nameless dread swept her,

With Limpy Ford dead she had nothing to fear, yet she knew the silent hills and peaceful cove could keep a terrible secret through eternity. Presently she thought of Bob MacGregor. He was a most comforting individual to occupy a girl's thoughts. She did not want to get Markey into trouble, for he was treating her with every courtesy, but she rather wished Bob would come along. She knew every incident of his colorful life by heart and much of the success he attributed to "fool luck" she knew to be the logical result of careful thinking, and a keen observance of everything that came under his eyes when he worked on a case. He knew that men did not stumble on clues—they dug them up. Bow was a digger.

Towards evening they anchored. A falls twenty feet high burst from the wooded ridge above the water. Off to the left she saw a small beach and hidden in the trees except for one corner, a cabin. The place was apparently deserted, yet there was something suggesting that it was frequently occupied.

"Wait till I get the tender in the water," Markey told her, "and you can go ashore. If you don't mind cooking a meal I'll work while you cook. If you don't feel like cooking I'll get something to eat first and work afterwards. We'll have to stay here to-night. You can sleep either at the cabin or aboard the boat. I'll take what's left. There's nothing to be afraid of." He glanced upwards as he finished speaking. A hanging glacier gleamed, blue and green, in the fading light of day. It was a beautiful thing. "Nothing to worry about unless—" he paused, then added in a low tone: "No, that's bunk, too."

"Put me ashore and I'll clean up the cabin and cook dinner while you get your stuff up from below," his passenger said as she prepared to leave.

It was with a sensation of strangeness that Bob MacGregor set forth alone in the Taku. He might have had another deputy detailed to accompany him, but he enjoyed playing a lone hand game. When two were in on it, a disagreement as to method often resulted. This hampered activities.

He cruised among the various inlets and coves in the vicinity of Fleming's cabin first, then gradually widened the scope of his work until he had covered considerable area. He was trying to dig something out and at the same time kept close watch of passing craft. As a result he threw a bad scare into several gasboats whose owners boasted guilty consciences even if temporarily empty holds. One operator spent a lively half hour dumping his contraband over the side—an incident that livened the monotony of the cruise considerably. He had a clean bill when MacGregor boarded the craft.

For the most part the crews proved to be a silent, sullen lot, given to avoiding queries, or giving evasive replies.

Limpy Ford had not been seen in two weeks one man told him, nor did he know where he operated from. "And if I did I wouldn't tell you," he added defiantly, "I'm enjoying good health and want to live my life out. Ford is dynamite. You should know that by this time."

"I do," answered MacGregor; "thanks and good day. Be careful and not get caught running booze. The sentence is stiff these days."

"I won't!" rejoined the other with a grin.

MacGregor had been out five days when this incident occurred and even his patience was exhausted. He was doubling back now for another look closer at the Fleming cabin. With good fortune he could reach it some time early the following morning. The swaying mast of a gasboat caught his eye shortly before dark. But for the fact that he was dangerously close inshore, seeking small streams along which moonshiners were given to establish a base of operations, the craft would have been passed unnoticed. As he neared it certain outlines seemed familiar. He drew up alongside and an exclamation of delight escaped him. He had redeemed himself in part at least for there she rode in apparently as good condition as of old, the gasboat that had been stolen the day Edith Fleming wounded him.

A few practical tests proved the craft unharmed, and there was a fair supply of fuel in her tanks.

"I'd say she had been run from Fleming's to this point and no other place," he mused, "and that suggests that somebody brought her here and must be in the vicinity. Certainly Fleming did not steal her, for the craft is here and Fleming is in jail. He must have had some means of transportation back to town. His own boat no doubt. Well, that lets him out. And here is where I begin. But first I'll secrete the old bucket as a sort of ace in the hole if something happens to the Taku."

He took the gasboat in tow and moored her in another cove three miles away, and he did it after darkness so that hostile eyes from the shore might not observe the move. Then he returned and waited for daybreak.

The trip ashore early the following morning was not productive of results. There was not even a trail leading from the spot, unless bent twigs and broken bits of shrubbery marked the course taken by some lone person several days previous. But even this was so faint as to offer no immediate hope and he soon lost it.

Bearing off in the general direction of the faint trail, MacGregor piloted the craft slowly through uncharted waters. A wall towered above him a sheer hundred feet, unbroken for perhaps a quarter of a mile. He was about to head for safer water when he saw for the first time the outward appearance of unbroken expanse became less pronounced.

"By jingo!" he exclaimed. "Here's a real discovery. That wall does break and interlocks. Something is beyond."

Five minutes later he had the skiff over the side and was crossing a reef. Presently a tiny bay opened, and beyond that a narrow channel that led into a landlocked bay, lined with tiny coves and beaches. It extended for fully five miles into the mountains that guarded it from the prying eyes of the world. Hanging glaciers smiled down from lofty peaks. It was a little bit of paradise that he had blundered into.

He returned to the Taku, roughly sketching a course through the reef, taking frequent soundings with an oar. Then he crawled over the rocky barrier and entered the bay at slow speed. Nor did he show himself, for a hundred spots along the

shoreline offered concealment for a rifleman. Lashing the wheel, he opened a port-hole in the cabin and searched the shore with binoculars, running frequently to the pilot house to change the course.

"Man, man!" he exclaimed presently, "this is luck. This is the place Markey has holed in these many months. There's his Daisy Jane riding snugly at anchor. Seeing no one on deck he won't know how many of us are here. That'll help some." He searched for signs of smoke and seeing none concluded his approach had been discovered.

By way of saving time he put the Taku alongside the Daisy Jane and made fast. There was no one aboard he knew because he knew her tender was on the beach bottom up. Her bow, piled high with provisions, interested him for it suggested Markey was just getting his grub ashore. A sack of flour was wet and soggy. MacGregor recalled it had rained two nights previous.

"Careless with his grub. No, his sort are careless with nothing that means life. There's something amiss here."

MacGregor entered the boat's cabin and stood dead in his tracks in the doorway. A dead weasel had been placed on the table. Decomposition had already set in, indicating the animal had been dead nearly a week. Before the mirror he found two hairpins, and a powder puff. He had seen the puff once before—the day Edith wounded him. She had dabbed deftly at her nose just before going for the water. The puff appeared to have been wet and dried out for it was in a bunch as if squeezed together. He placed the pins and puff in his pocket, then rowed ashore.

The cabin door was partly open. On the table was a partially eaten meal. Evidence of a woman's hand was in abundance here. A cloth had been placed on the bare table, the knives and forks had been placed properly, at one plate. The position of the knife and fork at the other plate indicated they had been hurriedly put down. A coffee cup was half full beside this place. It was evident some one had been interrupted in the midst of a meal. The significant bit of evidence that dwarfed all

else of interest in the cabin was the presence of a dead robin in the center of the table.

During all his years in Alaska MacGregor had not found dead robins nor weasels about. He knew they died eventually as did other forms of life, but he simply had not found them about. Nor had he heard of others finding them. So far the presence of a weasel seemed to indicate death, as in the case of Jennings some months ago and more recently in the stabbing of Fleming. But who had died on the schooner and where was the body? What did the robin mean? A dead robin had been left in his cabin. Did it indicate a warning or possibly the threat of death? If so was the weasel a sign of the fulfillment of the threat.

MacGregor was now convinced a connection existed between the two. It was no mere chance. He sought to confirm this theory and proceeded to search the vicinity for newly made graves. The grass about the cabin was undisturbed. He looked out upon the placid waters of the bay, which, so peaceful and smiling, held the secret.

Two people had been at the cabin. That was evident. The interruption had come from a third. If murder, it had been done quickly if at all. With this in mind MacGregor began to search the cove in the vicinity of the Daisy Jane.

He could see to a depth of several feet, thanks to the clearness of the water. He paddled about in widening circles studying the bottom searchingly. Fully an hour passed before he located anything of interest. A white rock, perhaps two feet by two, of irregular shape, stood out clearly against the bottom. Near at hand a murky object tugged at a bit of line.

"That's it!" he exclaimed, "it's going to be a gruesome investigation, but must be done. First I must dig a grave on the beach. Even if it's a lowly Siwash breed it is entitled to decent burial."

Lack of time reduced the depth of the grave to four feet and he had selected a spot where the ground was easily worked. Then he found a grapple aboard the launch. Bringing the object to the surface was not difficult. He cut the stone loose, rove a line through the rope that had been lashed

about the waist of the body and towed it ashore.

The icy cold water had retarded decomposition; the features were recognizable. Markey had gone the way of Jennings.

The business of official examination and burial over, MacGregor wrote a brief report of the matter, locked the cabin, boarded the Taku and ran down the bay at top speed. There was but one man in Alaska that he knew of who could aid him and to that man he was going.

CHAPTER V.

TOTEM LORE.

SQUATTING on some passenger dock while the tourists bought moccasins from his squaw, made low comments and tried to talk what amounted to "Pid-geon Indian," was Chief Samson's idea of a good time. The chief had a regular tribal name, but becoming interested in religion early in life, if somewhat temporarily, he rather liked Samson and had thereupon taken the name for his own.

"Yeah," he would remark to his intimates among the resident whites, "I get a great kick out of the line of chatter the tourists pass out. They pull wise cracks, play us for boobs and even make insulting remarks, thinking it goes over our heads, but the old Kloooh and I are wise. What'd they say if they knew I could buy and sell most of the tourists that come to Alaska?"

Yes, what would they say? The chief had a pair of halibut schooners working for him and they were engined so they could cut and run to Seattle to take advantage of the market if necessary. He owned a good house, an automobile and two of his daughters were attending the University of Washington. He had a son who drew an accountant's salary and a good one.

Chief Samson was no fool, even if he did squat beside his wife while she bartered moccasins for money she did not need.

"Hello, MacGregor, wat's on your mind?" exclaimed the chief as the marshal entered his home. "Have a cigar?"

"Thanks, Samson. I want some information on totems!"

"You are as bad as tourists. Well, the totem business is like the king business these days, it's pretty much on the bum. Our totem poles are still here and they served my fathers in good stead, but I prefer the Lord to the raven, the frog and the salmon."

"Exactly, but what is the meaning of a dead robin and a dead weasel?"

"Oh heck!" laughed the chief, "have you bumped into that old thing? I can tell you the story, but frankly it isn't even listed among our traditions. I think it is merely the wild tale of some native liar. If based on fact there are angles that wouldn't have been very pleasant. Here is the myth:

"There is a hidden cove down the coast away—the cove really exists, but few people have ever found it—this was the domain of a tough god that cracked the whip over people's heads and raised the deuce generally. He lived in an ice palace at the foot of a hanging glacier and demanded tribute from the few miserable souls who believed his bunk. He gave his orders and when they weren't obeyed or when he was out for revenge, he sent a slight hint of his wrath in the form of a dead robin. This meant lay off or kick in, as the case might be. If the subject did not come to time or if his death was necessary, the subject was neatly bumped off and a sign indicating why placed near. This sign was a dead weasel. You can imagine the effect of finding a male relative dead and a weasel somewhere about. That told the whole story. Chances are the next time the god spoke to that family, they hopped to it. Are you interested?"

"Intensely so!" exclaimed MacGregor.

"The god was a gay old bird evidently, for he picked the cream of the native beauties for his own. They became the god's bride for one month and were then sacrificed in the temple of ice. If a man got in wrong the quickest way to square things was to scare up a fair maid and rush to the god. That wiped the slate clean. As a result of these kidnappings, outraged lovers and brothers frequently took a hand and at times the supply of robins and weasels must have run low indeed. Heavens, MacGregor, you're not sick, are you?"

An expression of real alarm passed over the chief's face.

"No, I'm all right, chief, but I am cursed with a vivid imagination, that's all. Thanks, I must be going. I have to cable a report to Gregory up the line yet. Thanks, again. The legend was interesting."

"Don't confuse that infernal rot with our real legends for which I confess a sneaking admiration."

"Rot, perhaps," thought MacGregor, "and again perhaps not. Some human brains get queer twists at times."

"Say, Mac, I don't want to predict trouble, but that worthless Limpy Ford has a girl in the village. It's the one decent thing in the fool's life. She has disappeared and gossip has it some youth has eloped with her. If Limpy takes the trail there'll be a fine old row and Limpy will hear of it when he comes to town again."

"No robins or weasels scattered about the lady's home was there?" queried MacGregor half in earnest.

"That's the funny part of it. There was a dead robin." The chief laughed. "Now I'll spoil it all—the cat was eating the robin. Caught it no doubt." The chief's chuckle was ringing in the deputy's ears as he hurried down the path. He was enjoying his little joke, but MacGregor was thinking, "Is it a joke, this unbelievable tale?" There was much real evidence indicating it was unpleasantly real.

His cable to Gregory was brief, considering the varied happenings since he left headquarters:

Markey murdered. Am investigating in connection with other matters. If not back in ten days take up my trail. Mailing map of country and detailed report.

He sketched a map showing the entrance to the unknown bay and surrounding region. While he still preferred to solve the mystery alone, nevertheless he had a lively appreciation of the possibility of meeting the same swift end that had overtaken Jennings, Markey and others. Apparently they hadn't had a chance. A single knife thrust and it was over. Nor did he forget that he had received the usual warning—the dead robin.

With all this in mind, he refueled the Taku took on a quantity of provisions and set forth with an eagerness that he had never felt on any other quest. Not once had he forgotten Edith Fleming's peril. Suppose some mad native had set himself up as a god and was carrying out all the strange rites of the legend? Incredible as it seemed to MacGregor, he knew the vastness of Alaska and the thinly scattered population made such a thing possible.

MacGregor traveled without lights that night as usual. He could avoid other craft that carried the required ones, and those that did not he had no wish to avoid. They would bear investigation. With hatches closed down tight he stood in the wheelhouse steering from point to point, occasionally sending the white finger of his searchlight into hidden coves. He was overlooking nothing afloat these days.

Shortly after midnight the Taku rocked violently as the wash of a passing craft caught her hull. MacGregor shut off his engines and listened. He could distinctly hear the high pitched rumble of a motor boat. She was either fast or large, perhaps both, for she kicked up a wave of considerable size. MacGregor swept the horizon directly ahead, and a gray craft carrying a "bone" in her teeth, stood out sharply in the white flood of light.

Though the Taku shot ahead at full speed the marshal realized he was being left astern. The figure of a girl suddenly leaped into the glare. He saw her hesitate the barest moment at the rail, then leap into the sea. A moment later a lifebuoy with a flare was dropped. Instead of racing from the spot as MacGregor expected, the water astern was lashed in fury as the gray craft's motors were reversed. For several moments she continued ahead with reversed engines, then a pause and she shot backward.

A man with a line about his waist leaped overboard, caught the girl and the two of them were dragged aboard dripping. She had escaped and been recaptured literally under his nose. He caught a final glimpse of a furiously fighting maid as the craft once more got under way.

The rifle he held in his hands was useless. He had emptied it at the pilot house of the

boat while man and girl were in the water, but once she was aboard he dare not fire for fear of hitting her.

"The time is coming," he muttered, "when the government must issue craft that will outrun anything others can possibly build."

He kept the other boat flooded with light and clung desperately astern until she was swallowed in the shadows ahead. MacGregor had a hunch he knew where she was bound. It was still dark when he reached the strait leading to the hidden bay. He chanced destruction and entered at full speed, guided by the stars overhead and the crude chart he had previously sketched. He wanted to moor his boat and be on his way before daylight. There was but one regret in his mind and that was his previous visit. Perhaps watchers had seen him enter and been warned.

The Taku grounded a half hour later with barely a sound. MacGregor leaped ashore and pulled the stern in close with a line and secured it, then he cut down a number of small trees and vines and covered such parts as were not completely hidden. He had learned the art of camouflage overseas.

A shaft of light suddenly swept the shores of the cove, searching along lazily, lingering here and there. It lingered several moments on the Daisy Jane riding at anchor, then was switched off. A man's voice came over the water angrily: "Why the devil wasn't that tub removed?" Flashlights bobbed about, came a rattle of oars and the stifled scream of a woman.

"Right in the thick of it!" whispered MacGregor. "It might have been wise to bring help along, but it's too late now. Here goes!"

Within a few rods of the boat dark eyes glittered as MacGregor struggled through the brush. The officer was trying to move without noise. The other did move noiselessly as he crept toward MacGregor. Presently he waited with hands outstretched, fingers curved like powerful claws, then he leaped, and as the officer went down from the silent attack, the fingers clutched at his throat with a grip from which there was no escape. Presently they relaxed slightly.

"Now," he muttered, "now I must find and kill a weasel. Revenge has been done! The great god, Sing Yat, will smile once more."

With the coming of dawn he crouched in a natural clearing. The powerful hands now held a knife, and from his lips came a strange hissing sound; presently the head and curious eyes of a weasel peered cautiously above a log. The hissing ceased, then began again. The weasel's curiosity increased and he crawled higher. Then the knife flash and the struggling animal was pinned to the log by the deeply embedded blade.

The man removed the weasel, looked at the hanging glacier high above and made a sign. Then he retraced his steps to the spot where he had left the officer. The man stooped and turned the body. It was the creed that the knife thrust must be made in a certain spot in the back.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TEMPLE OF ICE.

THE glacier worked its way down from twin peaks, up the sides of which extended the icy arms. The face of the ice sheet came almost to timber line and on occasion ice broke off in great masses and tumbled into a boulder strewn bed where it shattered and melted. A stream like a thread of silver on a carpet of green extended from glacier to cove in a series of cascades and falls.

Just above timber line smoke trailed upward through a hole in a flattish rock. Sitting before the opening of the cave extending into the rock was a strange creature in human form. At first glance one might guess he was Chinese. The Oriental slant of the eyes was there, but there was also much of the Indian in his expression and features.

Sing Yat was the offspring of a Chinese father and Indian mother. In his make-up was all of the worst and none of the best of the two races. In thought and action, yes, and in cunning he was Chinese. The inscrutable eyes looked down onto the timber line and cove steadily. One might, it

seemed, toss a stone into the quiet waters a thousand feet below so abrupt was the land.

Sing Yat's eyes suddenly flashed and he clapped his hands. A native girl stood trembling before him. Perhaps she had been beautiful in a native way at one time, but terror had long since wiped away any trace of beauty. The spell Yat exercised over her was almost hypnotic.

"The white girl?" he queried.

"She still has the knife and plans to kill herself if any one comes near her."

"Is she afraid?"

"No. Her eyes flash fire." A sickly yellow smile passed over Sing Yat's face.

"What she is about to see will break her! Come here!" The girl shrank from him. "Come!" His eyes blazed and he grasped her wrists and quickly bound her.

He paid no attention to her screams as he carried her over rock strewn ground straight to an ice cave. Here water gushed from the glacier and thirty feet above an arch of ice held the great mass of it clear of the stream. At times the arch would break and crash in, but pressure formed another even as it destroyed the first.

Within was a temple of ice, the beauty of which no artist could hope to duplicate in its rare colorings of indigo and varying shades of blue. A steady leakage from the dome created the effect of rain and where a shaft of light shot into the depths, magic took a hand and transformed the drops to glittering diamonds.

The native girl had fainted by the time Sing Yat had entered and placed the limp form on a block of ice. She did not hear his words: "To-night my bride will sit opposite me! To-night a new moon lingers over the peaks and falls."

He lashed her securely and the dripping water revived her. Sing Yat glanced at the barred window of the cave. Pressed against the bars was the pale face of a white girl.

He entered. The room was walled off into compartments, but the compartment serving as a prison also had bars on the inward side.

"You see," he said coldly, "that I am equal to carrying out my threat. And who will stop me? These poor fools that serve

me? Certainly not. They know the legend and I am careful to follow it. At stated times a virgin was sacrificed in the ice temple. If she doesn't freeze to death, die of terror or go mad, then the ice is sure to fall in sooner or later. I have, ah—changed the ritual at times to suit my purpose. The god has some little leeway and it offered him a means of obtaining a new favorite when he wished."

"What is the object of it all?" the girl queried. A barred door was between them and she still retained the knife. He knew better than to enter just yet.

A yellow smile spread over his face. "I cooked on a fishing schooner, and Limpy Ford was a member of the crew. I found him superstitious and played on his mind for nearly a year. I found it necessary to destroy a friend of his, but it won me his undying allegiance because he now believes me a god. Several others have since been prevailed upon to believe, thanks to my peculiar methods. Moonshining has been profitable, and those who interfered were first warned with a dead robin. Failing to heed the warning, they were destroyed and the sign of the totem placed on the body or if the body was hidden, then in their place of abode.

"You must have known of the legend, for you found a robin on the step of your father's cabin. Limpy Ford left that, for your father interfered with his plans to kill MacGregor. Then you found it in the cabin down at the cove as you were about to sit down and eat. You must have known because you fled in time to see them lowering Markey's body into the bay.

"I am not a fool! I know that this can't go on forever. Some one would be caught and forced to confess, or some officer would locate this place. I am ready to spend the remainder of my life in China. One may have many servants there for a few dollars a month. My father taught me the language and my Chinese blood runs strong within me. My fools have given me much money because they were afraid to do otherwise. Once a man rebelled. The others were kept here and listened to his screams for three days. Then he died. It had its effect. See?"

He opened a number of safe deposit boxes crammed with bills and gold. "There is a fortune here. I am ready to go. I have sense enough not to go too far nor remain too long."

She listened to the fascinating tale as it unfolded and realized that in truth Limpy Ford was actually crazy and the sinister yellow creature before her had played upon his disordered mind to the limit.

"On Kodiak Island one finds the most beautiful native girls. The Russian and Aleut blood blends strangely, and coloring and beauty results. I wanted one of these creatures for my princess to take to China with me. I ordered my men to select the prettiest from a number going south to attend school. They failed and they knew what failure meant, particularly Limpy Ford. Then he brought you. I am satisfied. I tell you this so you will know there is no escape."

"Release that poor girl in there. She is going mad with fear."

"Whenever you consent to go through the simple ceremony of becoming my consort," he answered.

The white girl shuddered. He bided his time knowing sooner or later the unfortunate's screams would drive the other girl to distraction. Sing Yat stepped into the open at the sound of footsteps and the girl noticed he instinctively gripped his pistol. Two men were climbing up the slope, bearing a burden. Like Limpy Ford they showed a strain of white blood—the offspring of scum tossed ashore by the restless tides of the North Pacific.

The pair dropped their burden at Sing Yat's feet, and almost instantly she was up and struggling. There was something wild about the native girl that aroused Sing Yat. His eyes lighted with the fire of covetous possession for she was fighting furiously and her eyes blazed as she struggled.

"We almost kidnapped a Kodiak girl when the steamer stopped at Wrangell," said one of the men, panting from his efforts, "but failed. We stopped at a cannery, and when she walked on the beach we caught her. She leaped overboard when a gasboat turned the light on us, but with our faster speed we backed and picked her up. That was

last night. The boat was the Taku, I believe, but we escaped easily."

Both men dropped to their knees in the most humble manner, but Sing Yat ordered them up with a wave of his hand. His face was inscrutable once more, but in his mind thoughts ran swiftly.

"Two will go," he mused, "the white and the native girl, and one's spirit will break. She shall be the drudge and the other the consort. I shall win her love and devotion." The yellow eyes narrowed, then widened, as a man burst from the timber line.

It was Limpy Ford. Watching him, they did not observe something akin to a shadow flash from boulder to boulder. Like Ford, the pursuer limped slightly.

Ford's face was pale as he threw himself down before his chief, then he suddenly caught sight of the native girl. "Mary!" he cried. "Mary!" Madness leaped into his eyes as he saw the sallow face of Sing Yat. The Chinaman went for his gun and fired as a knife flashed. The thing on whose disordered mind he was preying had turned and was about to destroy him, for he had touched the thing the mad native loved. The same knife that had split a weasel now split Sing Yat's yellow wrist.

He jerked the knife clear and fled, bounding like some frightened animal up the slope. Hard on his heels came the native. His limp hampered him somewhat, but his madness was carrying him on remorselessly. Around his mouth was a slight froth, and he hurled epithets in dialect at the fleeing Sing Yat.

The shadow that had flitted from rock to rock now came into the open, quick to take advantage of the diversion. "Put up your hands!" he barked, and backed the order with a forty-five automatic pistol.

"Bob MacGregor! Thank God!"

"Where are you, Edith?" There was utter relief in MacGregor's voice. "Are you all right!"

"Yes, Bob, safe enough, thanks to my hunting knife. Sing Yat did not want a dead girl and things were deadlocked."

MacGregor manacled his two prisoners, removed their weapons, and then released Edith Fleming. It was no time for ex-

change of confidences and yet it was more than the reaction to long hours of danger that caused her to momentarily rest in his arms and find contentment.

A grinding that had changed from a low rumble to a shattering crash filled the air. A great block fell from the arch of the ice temple, vanished in the pool below, and lurched upward as if resentful of the immersion. Edith pointed helplessly.

"The poor creature!" she cried. "Sing Yat's slave. She's been here six months and he's destroyed her mind."

MacGregor was already working his way along the narrow ledge between wall and pool. He felt the chill breath of the cave as a vagrant puff of wind came from the depths—the breath of cold death. Above him the ice began grinding once more, shattered bits fell about him; a rush of water drenched him as some hidden pocket of drip was released. He slashed at the ropes with his knife, then lifted the native girl to his shoulder and fled as rapidly as the icy floor permitted.

Out in the sunlight once more MacGregor placed the unconscious girl on a spot where grass had grown up between the rocks. Edith took her in her arms and the gentleness of the touch, or perhaps it was the warmth of the sun, stirred the light of reason slightly. The eyes were filled with terror as they opened, then as the white girl smiled down the poor creature cried softly and clung desperately.

"It is all right now," Edith whispered, "and it will always be all right."

"Sing Yat!" she sobbed. "Is he dead? When I awoke this morning there was a dead robin on my bed, and I knew. Then before he carried me into the ice cave I saw him come from the woods with a weasel. You were soft and pretty, so I knew it wasn't for you. He likes soft, pretty things, like I was when Limpy Ford brought me here."

"And you'll be soft and pretty once more," Edith promised; "the color is coming back to your cheeks even now." Sometimes one is justified in lying just a little.

Sing Yat's face was a ghastly pallor as he climbed an icy slope and tried to stop the

avenging thing behind him. He released several small blocks and watched them rush toward Limpy Ford with the swiftness of an arrow. The native bared his dirty teeth in a smile, crouched until the danger was over, then rushed onward, heedless of life itself in his terrible pursuit.

Cornered, Sing Yat faltered, then stepped onto a slope that extended from a point a hundred feet above them downward to a spot where the glacier overhung the valley; where it discharged ice with a crash onto the boulder strewn floor below.

He crawled like some insect, digging into the ice with his knife as he progressed. Safety lay a hundred yards ahead, then eighty. Another struggle and he had reduced it to forty. If he could but make it, he could turn and send Limpy Ford down the chute to destruction.

Far below MacGregor, Ethel, and the natives watched the pursuit. The figures in their dark clothing struggled on the white mass like squirming monkeys. They saw Sing Yat draw nearer and nearer to the dark mass that spelled safety for the moment, even escape from the law as well as Limpy Ford's vengeance. Then the pursuing figure leaped and caught Sing Yat by the legs.

The Chinaman's fingers clawed desperately and in the sunlight they saw the flash of his knife blade as he slashed at his captor. Slowly at first, then with increasing speed they rushed down the slope. Humans at first, humans locked in a death struggle, then balls that separated and bounded high in the air as they hit obstructions. Limpy Ford was dead when he shot into space and vanished below. The watchers saw Sing Yat's hands meet over his head as if clutching for support in thin air.

Edith looked away as he vanished. MacGregor shrugged his shoulders. A fitting end for the pair indeed. His quest was over. As usual he could see little that he had accomplished. Sing Yat and Limpy Ford had automatically eliminated one another.

Chief Samson had told him of the legend which made it possible for him to proceed intelligently. True he had come out on top various encounters.

He laughed at the expression on Limpy

Ford's face when the man had returned with a dead weasel to finish him off that morning. He had reached down to turn MacGregor over and the officer had nearly dislocated his shoulder. Only by luck had Limpy escaped. Then he had hurried to report to Sing Yat, only to see the girl he loved a prisoner. The girl's captors had not known the identity of their captive. They had selected the prettiest girl and that automatically eliminated the rest. The suffering of the other native girl now softened her own blow. She had seen a new Limpy Ford, different from the one who always had money and brought her presents.

The male prisoners were sullen, but aboard the Taku, homeward bound, MacGregor turned the wheel over to Edith and proceeded to take the sullenness out of the pair. Presently they talked. He had one question to answer when he reported to Gregory and he knew now the answer must come from them. "Who killed Jennings?" he demanded.

"We didn't! We weren't near there. We can prove we were at Wrangell."

"I know you didn't kill Jennings, but I want to know who did. Now out with it, or I may charge you with it just for luck. A jury wouldn't require much evidence in your particular case."

"Limpy Ford killed him! He stole Fleming's knife and when the point broke off he saw a chance to throw suspicion on his partner, so he put the knife back in Fleming's cabin where he'd find it."

MacGregor nodded. He glanced up as Edith entered. "Bob," she said, "what happened to my father?"

"I've been waiting for an opportunity to break the news. I didn't just know how to go about it. He was knifed and I have no doubt Limpy Ford did it, though he vanished at the time. How did you know?"

"But he is not dead, Bob. You have forgotten the radio receiving set on the Taku. I was playing with it and tuned in on the broadcasting station at Juneau. They say that despite his desire to die that he will live and be prosecuted for Jennings's murder. Why should he want to die? All these years I have worked with him. You

know he was different after the rock fell at Treadwell that time. But he is getting better, Bob, and now that I have just won out, this comes."

"Don't worry; he won't be prosecuted for Jennings's murder, nor anything else, considering the suffering he has undergone lately. He believes you dead, Edith; that's why he has no desire to live. Tell me why you fought against his killing Limpy Ford and yet you were willing to kill him yourself if necessary."

"Because," she replied, almost defiantly, "dad had made threats; public sympathy was against him, and I knew that if he killed Ford even in self-defense it would mean either hanging or life imprisonment. They had quarreled and the day I shot you I thought it was Ford returning, for a robin had been placed at our door that night. As a matter of fact, he was in the vicinity, for he caught me within two hours when I was getting you a drink. Only the night before I had completely won my fight with dad. He had planned to take the right trail when you came. You missed your boat. Dad stole it and anchored it two miles away, so that if you decided to take me prisoner I'd have a chance to escape while you were hunting the boat. If not, then I was to tell you its location."

"How'd Limpy Ford escape drowning when Markey threw him overboard?"

"He swam from rock to rock until he reached shore. It was that that convinced him he was immune from death. Sing Yat had told him no living person could kill him as long as he enjoyed the favor of the god. That proved it."

"I guess that clears up the devilry caused by that infernal legend. That is everything except the happy ending. Most legends have a happy angle, you know, Edith, and it sort of seems up to us to work one out." He looked at her intently and she glanced back shyly as if to assure herself they were not observed.

"You solved the mystery, Bob," she replied, "perhaps you can work out a happy ending."

"I can, and I'm going to begin right now!" he replied.

THE END



A Stranger in Town

By J. U. GIESY and JUNIUS B. SMITH

Authors of the Semi-Dual Stories, "The Wolf of Erlik," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PART I.

EDDIE HARMON, architect, comes to San Francisco to spend a care-free vacation. While admiring the lines of a skyscraper, a man in a gray suit accosts him, thrusts a hundred dollar bill into his hand, slaps his face, and runs. Eddie pursues hotly—until the arm of Patrolman Jenkins halts him. Jenkins insists he's the man he has been pursuing, a chemist called Blumefeldt, who has escaped during a raid on counterfeiters who were buying from him the secret of bleaching India ink. Eddie realizes that his assailant tricked him into pursuit in order to make his own escape.

In the police station Eddie hotly demands a lawyer, and from the telephone book picks out M. C. Elton as his attorney. "Elton" turns out to be a girl. When Police Captain Salles, and Marvin, a special agent of the Federal government, who supervised the raid, appear, they realize Harmon isn't the missing Blumefeldt, but suspect him of some connection with the fellow. The hundred dollar bill which Eddie has thought counterfeit is genuine, Marvin asserts.

CHAPTER IV.

SALLES SPRINGS A SURPRISE.

GENUINE? You mean—it's real?" The words dribbled off Eddie's lips in a startled stammer. It had been a real bill! Somebody had run up

to him and hit him and given him a hundred dollars of actual money and he had tried to throw it away, and Jenkins had taken it from him. Once more his thoughts began to jumble. This latest development was as crazy as all the others that had kept bobbing up all afternoon. It didn't

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make sense. Such things weren't done. They didn't happen.

"Then—why did that fellow give it to me?" he exclaimed.

"That," said Captain Salles, "is something you ought to be best able to explain."

"I had?" Eddie faltered. "But—I don't know anything about it. I'm a stranger in the city."

For the second time, Salles and his companion exchanged glances and the captain addressed the warder. "Unlock the door, Joe, and we'll go where we can all sit down and talk it over. There's a lot to this thing that ain't quite plain."

The warder complied. The key grated in the lock. Harmon and Miss Elton stepped outside. What next? Eddie asked himself. Was there never going to be an end to the delay—the squandering of his time—before the police decided to admit their mistake and apologize for the inconvenience they had caused him and turn him loose? The case had fizzled. If the bill was genuine money, they hadn't a thing against him, not a thing. They couldn't very well prosecute him for running after a man who had given him real money. The affair was as good as ended. He glanced at the girl, moving down the corridor of cells beside him, and surprised a slight frown of something like consideration between her eyes.

Vaguely he felt annoyed. A twinge of disappointment stabbed him. She didn't seem in the least elated by this complete vindication of her client, nor pleased at the imminence of his release. Of course, there was no real reason why she should. She hadn't known he existed an hour before, but just the same an attorney should take some interest in a case.

The barrier of the jail clanged shut behind them. Eddie drew a chest-filling breath. At least he was outside its metallic restraint and after Salles had held his little talk he would go back to his hotel, pack his suit case and get a train.

Salles turned aside and opened a door. They entered an office of some sort. They sat down—Salles and Marvin on either side of a flat-topped desk, Mildred and Eddie in a couple of roomy chairs.

The captain began at once: "You was standin' on a corner, when some one ran up and gave you that bill this afternoon?"

"Yes, sir." The thing was getting to be an old story to Eddie, but he answered without hesitation. If Salles wanted to hear it first-hand, he was willing to tell it again. "I was standing there looking at a building. I'm a stranger in town, and—"

"One moment, captain," Miss Elton interrupted. "You can verify that, I think. Mr. Harmon tells me he has a room at the Fairview and that his money and return railroad tickets to Chicago are in the hotel safe."

Salles glanced at Marvin. "See what the Fairview says about it, will you?" he requested and turned again to Eddie. "You was standin' there lookin' at this building, and—"

"He put the bill in my hand and said here was what he owed me and slapped my face, and ran."

"And as soon as you saw the bill you started to run."

"As soon as I realized what had happened, yes, sir. At first I was startled. I could hardly believe the thing had really happened. There was no reason why he should have given me the bill or hit me. I didn't know him from Adam. I'm a stranger—"

"But you started runnin'?" Salles cut short any further explanation.

"Yes, sir."

"After him?"

"Of course." Eddie's tones exhibited a slight impatience. "I wasn't merely running for exercise, captain. The fellow slapped—"

"Yes, yes." Once more Salles interrupted. "You started runnin' just as Jenkins come along?"

"Jenkins?" Eddie repeated. "I don't know. The first thing I knew about Jenkins was when he nearly tore the coat off my back."

The door opened and Marvin, who had left the room in response to the captain's suggestion that he check up on the Fairview, came back and resumed his seat. "Somebody by the name of Edward Harmon has a room there all right and his

key is at th' desk. He deposited some money and some tickets in the safe this afternoon. He left right after that and hasn't been heard of since."

Salles nodded and Eddie grinned. Once more he was vindicated, the truth of his statements proved. All at once this interview on which the captain had insisted seemed very silly, a useless rehash of facts already established.

"There's a pretty good reason why I haven't been back to my hotel," he remarked.

The captain frowned. Apparently he was none too well pleased with Eddie's amused expression. "Sure. And while you're about it, you might as well suggest as good a one for Blumefeldt's givin' you that bill."

Eddie stared. His grin faded. The trouble with this whole affair was that just as everything seemed perfectly all right, some other consideration kept bobbing up in official minds. All at once he felt vaguely troubled—that exasperation which had flamed in his breast during his searching and examination earlier in the day returned in a measure upon him. What was the matter with these men? What were they driving at? What did Salles have in mind? But—Salles seemed waiting for an answer. He actually had the appearance of expecting Eddie to explain.

"Why—I—I don't know," he confessed with a markedly uncomfortable feeling. "If it had been counterfeit it wouldn't have mattered—he might just have wanted to get rid of it, in case he was really captured, but—you say it's genuine and—"

"It sounds crazy don't it?" Salles leaned forward a trifle. His voice was suddenly gruff. "An' it is crazy—as crazy as Blumefeldt—an' that guy's crazy like a fox. Now I'm willing to admit we didn't know he was pallyn' with you, but we're hep to some of the stuff he pulled all right, an' we can put two and two together an' make four th' same as always out of that.

"He sets this date for a killin' with the Murgson mob. He agrees to sell 'em th' formula for that bleach he let on he used. They agrees to his price an' he goes to meet 'em, an' you blow into town. You mosey down an' stand on th' corner waitin'

an' th' first thing you know Blumefeldt comes along. Only things ain't just what you might call propitious for your going with him, wherever he was going an' splittin' a bunch of coin, because Blumefeldt's on th' jump. He hadn't quite succeeded in closin' th' deal when we cut in. He'd got th' money, but he hadn't turned over th' formula to th' buyers when we smashed in th' door, an' he beat it out th' window of his room. An' he takes their bundle with him an' jumps off a roof on top of Jenkins an' runs up th' street. An'—what does he do after that?"

The whole thing was news to Harmon. And the way Salles told it was far from plain. Because Salles was evidently working on the supposition that he had been acquainted with Blumefeldt, trying to trick him into some slip, some admission of guilty knowledge; trying his best to connect him in an accessory way at least with a crime. Salles knew he wasn't Blumefeldt, but—he was trying to show he was Blumefeldt's friend. He was trying to fix something on him. But he couldn't. He was innocent. He hadn't done a thing. He had told the truth exactly as he knew it all along, and—he would tell it again.

"He ran up to me and slapped my face," he said, "after he had put that bank note into my hand."

"Did he? That's the question?" Salles sat back in his chair. "Listen here, Harmon. I'm wise to th' story you told when they brought you in. But th' point is *did* he? All we know is that you was actually on that corner an' that just as Jenkins spotted you, you ran. What if, instead of givin' you anything more'n an earful of his trouble, Blumefeldt ducked for cover, an' you waited till you was sure Jenkins saw you, before you ran. You was safe enough, wasn't you? You knew we wouldn't find anything on you. An' once you were sure Jenkins thought he had the guy he'd been chasin', it was a cinch for you to stall him along."

The worst of the thing was that it might have happened just as Salles said. Provided always that he had been Blumefeldt's accomplice it would have been a rather clever thing to have done. Blumefeldt

would have made his get-away while Eddie led off Jenkins. It—it was even more plausible than his own account of what had occurred, if one looked at it from the standpoint of the police. Eddie had to admit it. The elation which had sustained him since Salles' arrival vanished. There was as small choice between being considered Blumefeldt or Blumefeldt's accomplice.

"Then I suppose you think that bill was really mine," he said in a small, uncertain voice.

"Exactly," Salles answered promptly.

"Then why did I try to ditch it?"

"You didn't. That was a stall. You pulled it after you knew Jenkins thought he had th' man he was after. You fooled him and that reporter, but—I'm copperin' th' bet myself. Well—"

He broke off abruptly and once more Eddie stared. He was speechless. This latest twist to the matter was about the weirdest thing he had ever heard. And—he found himself accused of being a lot more clever than he was for the first time in his life. But—Salles believed it. The man's expression declared as plainly as words that he thought he was near the truth.

Harmon studied that expression briefly and turned his eyes to Marvin. Marvin was watching him, watching, calmly, coldly, with an unwavering regard—and Marvin had said the bill was real. Then—all at once Eddie saw it. Marvin was a government man—one of those men who had been working for Blumefeldt's capture. Miss Elton had been right in saying the Federal agents would be drawn into the affair. No wonder she had walked out of the jail to this room at his side, with a frown upon her face. She had known Marvin for what he was, from the first.

He tried to gulp down a lump of apprehension that had bobbed up in his throat. He had tried to tell the truth and all he got for his pains was trouble. But—he'd stick to it. His voice came pitched to the key of excited protest.

"I tell you I never heard of Blumefeldt till he ran up and slapped me, and I've told you all I know about the thing already, and I can't tell you anything else!"

"One moment," Marvin took hold as Eddie came to a breathless pause. "As you doubtless realize, Mr. Harmon, I am a government man and there are times when in order to gain the objects of justice in a major instance, we are forced to a minor compromise. Now you are a young man and no fool, I take it. In fact, I may say I'm sure from the way you've carried this off. But, at your age you could use your brains to a better advantage than the swindling of your fellow mortals—if you had the chance. So then, let us presume that you are in possession of knowledge which we desire to possess, and that—"

"Hold on!" Harmon exploded. "If you mean that you think I know where Blumefeldt's hiding, why don't you say so frankly instead of beating about the bush?"

And though he kept his eyes on Marvin, he heard Mildred Elton gasp.

But Marvin smiled thinly. "Very well. Since you realize the situation, let us dispense with explanations. Naturally you expect to meet Blumefeldt, provided you are able. Let us do the meeting and we drop the case against you. We would hardly be justified in such a course if you refuse."

Eddie took a somewhat rasping breath. His cheeks felt flushed and he stared straight at the man before him, out of hot, dry eyes. "In plain English, you are suggesting that I tell you where Blumefeldt can be found, I suppose?"

"Precisely."

"But—I don't know myself. I don't know a thing about him! I've already told you that I'm a total stranger here, a dozen times."

Some new thing, some heretofore unevoked flaring-up of his manhood, crept into Eddie's tones as he replied. It was the same thing that had set the flush in his cheeks and put that almost pugnacious expression into his eyes. Of all the infernal muddles of which he had ever heard, this was easily the worst. These two men sat here, after building up a theory of criminal plot and action they had evolved from what they knew and now were trying to prove. They had erected a skeleton structure of a crime, and were trying to clothe it in the flesh of a confession, instead of plainly and sensibly

accepting the ungarbled truth. And they were trying to seduce him into what they fully believed would prove the betrayal of a comrade's trust. The thing had a nasty look to Eddie's mind. It flicked him to a wholly needless avowal—a refutation of the implied smirch on his nature: "And even if I was the sort of man you imagine, Mr. Marvin, I wouldn't sell out a man with whom I was working. I—wouldn't peach."

Then, as he broke off, he hardly knew why—perhaps because of that little gasp she had given at Marvin's proposition—he glanced at Miss Elton. It seemed to him that he surprised both trouble and admiration in her eyes—as though mentally she at the same time condemned and applauded his words.

And, as Salles and Marvin exchanged another glance of apparent understanding, she made her way into the conversation.

"As Mr. Harmon's attorney, it occurs to me, Captain Salles, that neither the state nor city has more than a concurrent jurisdiction in this matter and that you can scarcely hold him any longer unless the government wishes to file a charge."

Salles eyed her. "You are his attorney?"

"Yes. And I am fully convinced of his innocence of any connection with this affair, beyond what he admits."

Harmon blessed her in his heart—this little Portia he had so oddly chosen, with her wavy brown hair, and the firm little jaw now set in determined fashion, and the straight little nose, and the steady violet eyes. She was with him, believed in him. It steadied him some way as Salles once more addressed him.

"So you never saw Blumefeldt in your life?"

"Not unless he was the man who ran up to me this afternoon, as I've told you."

"Know Murgson or Irak or Welter?"

"I do not."

"Well," Marvin said on the heels of that positive denial, "we can see if they know him."

Salles nodded. He pressed the button of a buzzer. When an orderly answered the summons, he nodded again and the orderly disappeared.

Eddie set his teeth. It was all arranged.

It had all been planned before he was brought to this room. Third degree methods. That's what it was. It filled him with a fresh resentment.

"What do you expect them to do," he questioned from a quickly flaring impulse; "fall on my neck and weep?"

Marvin jerked chill-blue eyes toward him. "The point is that *they* don't know you're here," he said.

Mildred Elton put out a hand and laid it on Eddie's arm. He nodded and set his jaws. If Portia didn't want him to talk, he vowed he would keep silent. It was enough to make a man froth over, but her fingers could chain his tongue if she didn't want him to speak. So he ground his teeth together and scowled back at Marvin until the door was once more thrust open, to admit a large florid man, a middle-sized man and a still smaller specimen of manhood with a shrewd little wrinkled face.

Eddie viewed their advent still in silence, conscious that Salles and Marvin were intently watching both himself and the other men.

"Messrs. Murgson, Irak and Welter," Salles announced, jerking his hand in Harmon's direction, "I sent for you to tell me who this man is."

Three pairs of eyes fastened themselves on Eddie. But it was the large florid man who answered: "I never was good at riddles myself, cap," he suggested as he settled himself in a chair.

"Did you ever see him?" Salles' tones were snappy. Save for a series of glances passing between the newcomers—glances that might be of curiosity, noncomprehension, caution, or all three, it began to look as though he had failed in his endeavor to obtain any evidence of recognition between Harmon and the trio through surprise.

"Nope. An' he ain't much to look at, is he?" the florid man replied.

"Ever hear Blumefeldt speak of Ed Harmon?"

"Blumefeldt?" said the large man and paused. Once more he stared at Eddie and once more he shook his head. "Nope. This him? Well, what's the large idea? You got a notion you've pinched one of Carl's pals?"

He was quick, was the large man, to size

up a situation. And he was absolutely composed. Eddie envied him his quickness, his composure and the *sang froid* with which at the end of his answer he smiled. That smile seemed to annoy Captain Salles, and he shot back quickly:

"That's the question. Anyway Blumefeldt met him this afternoon—"

"After he made his get-away?" the middle-sized man interrupted.

Whereupon the large man turned his eyes toward the speaker and Salles smiled. "Yes, after he left you folks in his room."

The middle-sized man opened his lips and closed them. He was like a gasping fish with his almost bloodless lips and his high-bridged, slightly aquiline nose.

"Hold your jaw, Welter," the large man growled. His face had darkened swiftly and there was a tenseness to his lids.

"I don't just get your play here, captain," he said, "but I don't know the man, on the level. What's the trouble? Now that Carl's slipped through your hands, won't the old net hold your fish? You got hep to th' fact that you ain't got a chance to hang it on us this time? Is that why you're feelin' fussed?"

Salles scowled. A little flush of color came up and burned in his olive cheeks. It was clear that the taunt had scored him, just as it was clear that his announcement of the meeting between Eddie and Blumefeldt had affected the trio's nerves.

For a moment he glanced at Marvin, then: "You're a fly crook, Murgson," he returned. "I'll hand it to you for playin' 'em close to your chest, and—this time—you win. But you don't need to teach this office its business. You're at liberty to beat it as soon as you leave this room."

"Then we'll be leavin' now if there's no objections." Murgson rose. "*Au revoir*, cap—though I ain't intendin' that to mean many happy returns."

He walked to the door with his two companions, opened it and passed through it with them; was gone.

Salles eyed that door in glowering fashion until it was closed, then turned his regard to Harmon.

"All right," he said and thrust his fingers of one hand into the pocket of his vest.

"Here's that hundred dollar bill you tried to make out was phony. Get the rest of your stuff from the safe as you go out."

Go out! Murgson and Irak and Welter had gone already and Salles was telling him to go now and so far as Eddie knew, there had been no more arrests. Murgson and Irak and Welter were freeand—he was free, too, if he understood Salles' words. They were even giving him back the hundred dollar bill and telling him to get his other belongings as he went out. Well—he would do what the others had done. He wouldn't stand on the order of his going. He would get his things and go to his hotel and settle with his attorney and get a train. But first—

He rose. He eyed the bill in Salles' hand with almost a glance of repugnance. "That isn't mine," he said.

"It isn't ours either," Salles retorted gruffly. "Take it and get out."

Eddie took it. He didn't really want it, but he was not inclined to argue. Miss Elton had risen, and she was smiling. She was waiting to go with him. The bill didn't belong to him really, but neither did it belong to the police. Presumably it belonged to Blumefeldt. He took it and folded it up and put it into his pocket.

"This means that I'm at liberty, I take it," he addressed Salles for what he sincerely hoped was the last time in his life.

But it was Marvin who answered. "You're at liberty to go to your hotel, Mr. Harmon, and do anything else you please, except that until this thing is cleared up a bit more, I wouldn't leave town, I guess."

CHAPTER V.

A DEFIANCE.

HIS fingers still crowding the folded bill inside a pocket, Eddie stared or perhaps glared is a better word to describe the expression he turned on the quiet man at the desk.

They were turning him loose, but—they were not satisfied. They were letting him out, but—they were going to watch him. And they were going to watch Murgson and Irak and Welter. They couldn't hold them,

but they were going to keep them under their eye. It was an old-time trick. Neither the genuineness of the bill nor the avowal of Murgson that he was unknown to either his associates or himself had convinced Marvin that he was what he said. And so they were going to let him go, hoping he would lead them back to Blumefeldt in the end. He gulped down a startled mortification and his voice came thickly:

"You mean I can go out and run—with a string on my leg."

And Marvin smiled the least bit as he responded: "As a matter of fact, Harmon, I can't do anything else."

"Why?" Mildred Elton demanded.

"Because, my dear young woman, in view of the extreme importance of the matter which we have recently been handling, I am compelled to satisfy myself of your client's identity beyond any question, without the least regard to what I may *think* myself."

"Then," in a flash Eddie's little Portia caught at the salient element in his answer, "I think we have a perfect right to know of the details of the matter in which he is involved. Mr. Marvin, just what is the nature of the investigation on which you have been working? Personally we know nothing beyond the rather general statements made by Captain Salles. Mr. Harmon's connection with it began only when some one, presumably the man Blumefeldt, you were after, ran up and struck him."

Marvin appeared to consider as she paused. One would have said he studied the straight little figure before him, as well as her request. In the end he nodded.

"If you care to sit down again, Miss—I will tell you what I can. If your client is really involved, he already knows it, and if he is not, it will give him a better understanding of our attitude in the case."

Miss Elton turned to resume her seat. She nodded to Eddie. He regained his chair. As he sank into it, there was an almost savage impulse upon him to laugh. Almost he had got away—but not quite. Though this was different, of course, and he could not but admire Portia's interest in his welfare, which had plainly made her seek for definite information concerning the

muddle, from the coils of which it would now seem he was not even yet released. Too, as a matter of fact, he found that he was not averse to hearing some of the ramifications. He became aware of a rising interest as he waited for Marvin's further words:

"I'll have to go back something like three years." The I. D. man began when they had taken seats. "That long at least. Murgson, Irak and Welter were sent up that long ago for a three years' stretch. They were convicted of making and floating phony bills—and we got them with the goods. Their scheme was rather clever, too, if it had worked. And it would have worked if they'd had the right sort of paper, I guess. There was nothing wrong with their plates. Irak was their engraver and he's a shark. Welter made their ink—and it was the real stuff. But the paper got them.

"Murgson at the time was a teller in a bank. And here's how the thing was worked: Welter opened an account at Murgson's bank with twenty thousand dollars, real money. He drew on it, as any one might—took his drawings and opened other smaller accounts in other banks. From time to time he drew back and forth among the different accounts, taking from one and adding it to another. In that way he established what appeared a standing—and made Murgson's house value his account.

"Then he deposited fifty thousand of their spurious bills and Murgson began paying them out. And, as I've said, they'd have got away with it, too, if their paper had been right. As it was, the thing was soon detected and the source of the bogus bill was traced to Murgson's bank, of course. It was a thousand dollar note. An investigation followed. Murgson admitted that he had taken the thing in on Welter's account. I presume that part of the play was already fixed, if they were detected. Anyway, he tried to notify Welter of what had happened—a thing for which we were watching—and all three men were caught."

"But—where did they get the first twenty thousand?" Miss Elton asked, as Marvin hesitated briefly.

He gave her a quirking smile. He seemed

flicked by her pertinent question. And his response was instant:

"That is exactly the point. It is one we never found out. We had hard enough work on the case as it was. Murgson and Welter and especially Irak are sharp. Irak actually bargained with us before their trial. Of course, we could have sent them up for a longer term without any trouble at all, but—we wanted the plates. And Irak had them. That's how they got off with three years. But we got the plates and they were destroyed. We had seized all the remaining bills at the bank and we got those already put into circulation and considered the incident closed. But as a matter of fact, it was not. Now and then, ever since, without the least warning, a bogus bill, printed from the same plates, as we believe, has appeared."

"A backer?" said Miss Elton quickly. "What was he trying to do—recoup himself for the first twenty thousand?"

Eddie smiled at her quickness and Marvin eyed her out of slightly narrowed lids.

"You are quick at a deduction," he replied at length. "Perhaps. Anyway, I've brought the matter up to the time when Murgson and the other two had finished their terms. They're out. They've been living quietly so far as we know, and they've been watched. They made no questionable move from the time of their release until they and Blumefeldt got into touch and he offered to sell them the secret of a process by which government paper could be bleached."

"Government paper? You mean bank notes?" Eddie interrupted.

"Exactly, Mr. Harmon." Marvin stared straight back into his face. "You can see what that would have meant to Murgson and his pals, when I tell you that Blumefeldt's stuff would do what he claimed—and that they could have gained all the paper they wished at the price of one dollar bills plus a few cents for the concocting of a bowl of bleach. We know it would do it, for we saw it demonstrated this afternoon."

"You saw him—bleach—India ink?" For the moment Eddie had actually forgotten his position in his consideration of all Marvin's words might mean.

And once more he felt the man's blue eyes on him. "Precisely. As an architect, I see that you appreciate my statement, Mr. Harmon. It was the paper that had tricked them in their first attempt at counterfeiting, but with Blumefeldt's bleach, the question of paper would be simple and Irak could make new plates. This afternoon Blumefeldt mixed his solution and bleached both counterfeit bills, of which he had some in his pocket, and a genuine dollar bill Murgson furnished at his request. After that Murgson paid over the price he demanded—a hundred thousand dollars—"

"A hundred thousand dollars!" Eddie's exclamation sounded both involuntary and excited.

Marvin smiled more broadly than at any time during the conversation.

"Yes, Mr. Harmon. They paid it, and he started to write out the formula for them, and we intervened. We got Murgson and Irak and Welter, but we failed to get Blumefeldt, as you possibly are aware. Blumefeldt went out of the window, taking both his formula and the other people's hundred thousand along. He works quick, and thinks quick, too, I guess. He took time even after we were smashing in his door to throw the counterfeit bills he'd been using in demonstration and had returned to his pocket, into the bowl of bleach he had concocted, and smash the bowl on the floor—"

"What's that?" cried Harmon. All at once it seemed to him that he was seeing something if even dimly, as though something were trying to make itself evident to him through a jumble of clouding detail—as though if that detail were brushed aside it would be plain.

"Hold on—wait," he said again and sat staring at Marvin, who had checked his speaking, and was once more regarding him. "You—you say he'd been bleaching counterfeit bills and had put them back in his pocket and—that he took them out and threw them into the bowl after you were breaking into the room?"

"Exactly." Marvin nodded. He was watching—watching.

But Eddie didn't mind. Because one by one he was sorting over details. Blumefeldt

had possessed the secret of bleaching government money—and he had been intending to sell it to these men for a personal gain. And they had paid him the money—he had it. And then—then Marvin and the police had broken into the room. Blumefeldt left through a window, jumped off a roof onto Jenkins, and ran up the street—to him. And—and—he caught a long breath.

"See here," he exclaimed, "I've got the answer. Blumefeldt took their hundred thousand with him when he ran?"

Marvin nodded. He was watching, watching. There wasn't even a quiver to his chill blue eyes.

"And he destroyed the counterfeits he had in his pocket by dropping them into the bowl of bleach before he went out the window?"

Once more Marvin nodded.

"Only he didn't," Eddie declared in triumph. "He destroyed them all but one—and he found that one after he'd started to run away from Jenkins—and so he gave it to me and slapped me, so I'd run after him, and make a commotion, and help him to get away with that hundred thousand dollars, and—"

His voice trailed off, lost its first note of absolute conviction, faltered and died and left him sitting with a scowl upon his face, and tightly clenched hands.

Because Marvin's expression had subtly altered, and where the man had been seemingly giving his attention to Eddie's exposition of his alleged solution of Blumefeldt's actions, he now seemed in some way amused.

"Aren't you overlooking the fact that the bill he gave you was genuine, Mr. Harmon?" he suggested.

"But—couldn't he have *thought* it was counterfeit?" Eddie stammered. "Couldn't he have got a real bill mixed up with those counterfeits he was using—and not have known it—thought the thing was bogus in his hurry—just put his hand in his pocket and felt it and not had time to examine it closely—and thought he'd better get rid of it in case Jenkins overtook him."

And then again Eddie paused, because once more Marvin and Salles were exchange-

ing glances. And something was the matter—though Eddie didn't know what it was. Only he was sure that whatever it was it boded no good to him. For Salles was actually grinning and Marvin was shifting his blue eyes back from the captain.

In a sort of half understanding daze, Harmon heard him speaking. "That's exactly what he did, Mr. Harmon. Blumefeldt *had* a genuine hundred dollar bill in his pocket *with* the counterfeit notes, when we broke into his room."

Eddie gasped. He heard Miss Elton echo the sound. He sank back in his chair and regarded Marvin in something like horror. He had thought he had found the solution to the problem and once more he had blundered. Blumefeldt had been in possession of a genuine hundred dollar bill and Marvin had known it all along. But—it wouldn't do to let Marvin see that he appreciated how this attempt at explanation might be turned against him.

"He did?" he said rather weakly. "You mean—you saw it when you were watching?"

"Exactly. Blumefeldt had a genuine bill he alleged he had used as a copy in making the counterfeits he showed. He had to give some reason for selling the formula of the bleach instead of using it himself and he told Murgson that he couldn't make good enough plates himself to insure success in their use."

"Then—what is there so surprising in his having given it to me?" Eddie made a dogged effort to combat the fresh coils in which circumstance seemed determined to involve him. "He was in a desperate hurry and he had no time to determine whether he had thrown the genuine bill into the bleach or not."

Marvin, however, did not seem inclined to argue the question. "The surprising thing, Harmon, is not that he should have given it to you, but that you should have suggested the possibility of his having a genuine bill of that denomination in his possession," he said.

"But—that was the denomination of the bill he gave me," Eddie reminded. His breathing quickened. Oddly enough, without having done a thing to merit such treat-

ment, he experienced the feeling that he had been led on to his undoing, played with, trapped. Marvin thought he had trapped him. He thought that his mention of the possibility of Blumefeldt's mistaking the genuine bill for a counterfeit and passing it to him, showed guilty knowledge on his part. The thing left him practically breathless, actually aghast. He was like one lost in a morass. The more he sought to extricate himself from the mire of suspicion, the deeper he seemingly floundered into the bog. He glanced at Miss Elton with dumbly appealing eyes.

And Portia did not fail him. "Don't you think, Mr. Marvin, that your implying that Mr. Harmon's suggestion that Blumefeldt had such a bill in his possession after the man actually gave it to him, shows any ulterior knowledge on his part, is a bit far fetched?" she inquired.

Marvin's answer came promptly. "The point is that Blumefeldt gave him the bill. He would have been more apt to do so if he knew him."

"But—I thought you didn't believe it was given to him at all—that you thought his apparent attempt to rid himself of it was a subterfuge?" Miss Elton glanced at Captain Salles.

Marvin nodded. "That was Captain Salles's suggestion. Under the circumstances, however, we are compelled to fall back on theory to some extent. It is even possible that Blumefeldt actually gave it to him because, as he pointed out, he had no time in which to satisfy himself of its nature—and that the fact was still undetermined when Jenkins ran him down."

Miss Elton set her lips. "If we are to resort to theories," she rejoined, "my theory of this whole affair is that Mr. Harmon has told you the literal truth."

Her words had a surprising effect on Eddie. A moment before, he had felt harried by this new angle in the affair—acutely depressed. All afternoon he had been a veritable football of fate, until he had come to the point where he didn't know who or what was going to kick him next. But at this fresh evidence of her unshaken confidence in him, his faltering spirit stiffened. She was a loyal little advocate and she wasn't

shaken one little bit by these two self-superior men. Suddenly he let out a sneering laugh that was like a snarl of rage.

"They don't want to accept that theory, Miss Elton, because it would knock the spots out of theirs."

And, as Mildred half opened her lips to check him, he started up and stood, feet a little apart, hands thrust into the pockets of his coat. "As a matter of fact, Marvin, you'd a lot rather believe I knew Blumefeldt than not, wouldn't you? Come on—put the cards on the table."

Marvin viewed him coldly. "Why, yes," he said without the least hesitation. "As a matter of fact, I would."

"You'd rather think I wasn't as innocent as I claim?"

"Exactly. You appreciate the position, Harmon."

"Because—you think if I was guilty, I'd get you in touch with Blumefeldt?"

"Your deduction is extremely lucid."

"Then"—Eddie took a chest filling inhalation. It was useless to talk any longer with such men. It was useless to urge his innocence. They wanted him to be guilty—and no matter what he said, no matter how clearly he pointed out his connection in the matter, the real, inward meaning, the soul, as it were, of his words was bent. "Then," he repeated, "here's what I'm going to do. I'm going back to my hotel and go about my business. And you go as far as you like and—" He paused again and took his hands out of his pockets and rested them on his hips. He leaned a little bit forward and hurled his defiance at Marvin: "You hang anything on me if you can."

"Mr. Harmon! Mr. Harmon—please!" Miss Elton sprang from her seat. She took Eddie by the arm.

"Don't mind him, Mr. Marvin," she begged. "He's only a boy—and he's had enough done to him this afternoon to drive any one to distraction. Come, Mr. Harmon"—she tugged gently at his arm—"I want you to take me home."

"All right," said Eddie thickly. He glanced down and encountered her troubled expression. "Only"—he turned again to Marvin—"I've put myself on record and I guess you know where I stand."

"Absolutely," Marvin nodded. "And you want to mind your step, young man."

CHAPTER VI.

BRIGHT LIGHTS AND BLACKNESS.

ONCE more Miss Elton tugged at his arm. "Come, Mr. Harmon," she urged and led him out of the room like a sullen, panting child.

But he went. He went with her because he had reached the stage where he was practically unable to either think or speak; where he was choked by sheer emotion, incapable of expressing his wildly seething rage.

The fools—the fools—the unmentionable fools! Eddie's brain was whirling in an angry red mist. And his own futility only made matters worse, only nagged him into a state that made his breath unsteady, his expression a bit wild eyed.

He went almost stupidly with her. He waited in a glowering silence while his personal belongings were produced, and distributed them about his clothing, still without a word. Still following her lead, he accompanied her from the gray stone building and found himself in a night shrouded street, where sputtering arc lights flared.

"The fools—the infernal fools!" he burst out then, voicing the cry of his soul against the circumstantial snarl in which he was enmeshed. "Can't anything convince them, or have they simply made up their minds that they don't want to be convinced?"

"It isn't that, really," the girl beside him said. "I know it's terribly unpleasant and fearfully annoying, but—they have to be sure. That's all it is, I'm certain. And I'm positive they will establish your innocence of any improper connection with these other people inside the next few days."

Something in her manner of speaking gave Eddie pause. He was upset; not actually alarmed by the muddle into which he had stumbled, but resentfully annoyed. And perhaps the thing that had upset him most was his total inability to induce any of the men with whom he had come in contact to accept his word. Heretofore he had always made it his boast that his word was as good

as his bond. Of course, that was at home where he was well enough known, and here he was a stranger, but— He turned his face to his companion. She was his attorney. She had voiced her belief in the truth of his story as his attorney, as she needs must, of course. Fresh doubt assailed him. What was her personal opinion? He stammered into a question:

"But—you are—convinced?"

"I am indeed." She met his troubled glance directly, lifting steady eyes beneath a corner arc. "Otherwise I would have refused to have anything to do with your case. Would you like to know why I am convinced of your innocence, Mr. Harmon?" All at once she smiled.

Eddie nodded. "Yes."

Portia's smile widened. "Because, for a guilty man, you have such poor control of your tongue. Because you talk too much."

The grip of her fingers tightened on his arm as though by their pressure they would ease any possible sting her statement might contain.

With a start, Eddie became aware that they still retained their hold upon him—that she was actually leading him up the street, just as she had led him from the presence of Marvin and Salles, that all afternoon somebody had been leading him around: first Jenkins, and now this girl. Only her touch he didn't mind. Abruptly he chuckled. He put up a hand and covered her fingers with his own.

"I guess maybe I do need a guardian or a guide or something," he said. "You see I'm a stranger in town."

Once more her lips parted, flashing the white of her teeth. She withdrew her hand.

"That's better. And I think Mr. Marvin gave you the proper directions for your actions. All you have to do is to go about your business of seeing the city, just as though nothing had happened, for the next few days."

Eddie took a long breath. She was a wise little Portia, and she was a most attractive woman. In fact, she was the most attractive woman, so far as he could recall, he had ever known. And they had come together rather oddly and just now he

didn't wish to be alone. He made a suggestion on the impulse of the moment. "Then—help me to start seeing it, will you? Let's go to a restaurant and talk the whole thing over and have some supper. I haven't had a bite to eat since lunch."

"I'm hardly dressed—" she began with a flash of feminine evasion.

"Bother," said Eddie, overriding the objection in purely masculine fashion. "Anyway I've got to pay you for your time and trouble, and I'm apt to get fuddled up again if I try to consider this thing alone."

"But there's nothing to consider." Once more Miss Elton smiled.

"Please—Portia."

She gave him a glance. And suddenly she nodded. "Very well—there's a place down on O'Farrel if you really must."

Eddie nodded. "Do we take a car or a taxi? I'm a stranger as I told you."

"You don't need to repeat it," said Portia laughing. "There's a car coming. Let's get on."

Eddie helped her aboard. Already his spirits were rising. They had touched bottom, so to speak, inside the past few hours and now, in the way of youth, they were beginning to rebound. He sank into a seat at her side. At least he was out of jail, and Marvin would have the deuce of a time catching him in anything suspicious, and he was escorting Portia—he had called her Portia and she had seemed to understand and not resent his presumption—he was escorting her to a restaurant, and after that he was going to take her home, and— and—before he left he would ask if they couldn't go out again some evening. Since Marvin had said he must remain in the city he'd throw himself on her mercy—seek to induce her to share more of his sight-seeing with him. It would make him feel less a stranger.

She reached up and punched a button and rose as the car reached a stop.

Eddie helped her off, and steadied her at the crossings by a hand beneath her elbow, until the restaurant was reached.

They went in. It was quite a place. There was a main floor and a balcony. There were hat-girl pirates, and little tables with service calls, quite appropriately in

the form of lighthouses, if the pirates were considered, and a twitter of birds in cages among artificial leaves, and a bare spot in the center where bare-footed damsels danced.

They sat down and gave their order and Eddie thrust his fingers into the pocket of his vest, produced the hundred dollar bill and spread it out on the table.

"Here, in so far as I am concerned," he said, "is the cause of this whole confounded business. What am I going to do about the thing?"

"I don't see what you can do about it, Mr. Harmon," Miss Elton told him. "If Blumefeldt gave it to you—"

"Don't!" Eddie interrupted in tones almost appealing. "I'm sick of that man's name. I suppose he did give it to me really, and an hour ago I thought I saw the explanation. But—my suggestions didn't seem to be acceptable to Marvin or Salles."

Portia puckered her brows into lines of consideration. "I think we must try and excuse Mr. Marvin and Captain Salles under the circumstances," she said at last. "Personally I think Blumefeldt gave it to you because he is a clever man and knows enough of human nature to expect you to do exactly what you did."

Eddie made a facetious remark. "Even so, he was taking a long chance, giving me a hundred dollars. Most men when they saw what they had would have forgotten all about the slap in the face."

Miss Elton smiled again in playful fashion. "Remember that I was convinced of your honesty at once this afternoon. Probably he judged you a man who would be prompt to pay his debts."

"Oh, I say." Harmon grinned in a somewhat sheepish manner. He was young enough to desire a sophisticated air he did not possess.

But Portia put out a hand part way across the table. "Forgive me. Though seriously, you ought to be glad to impress people as honest—as a man of your word."

"Man of my word?" Eddie rejoined. "You're the only one who has showed any inclination to accept it this afternoon and evening and Marvin and Salles are trying their best to make me out a thug."

"They're trying to do their duty." His companion sobered; an almost introspective expression crept into her violet eyes. "They're trying to uphold the law. Try and think how sure they have to be in this matter. Think what those men meant to buy with their hundred thousand dollars, the secret that keeps the genuineness of such money as this on the table between us safe—the secret of bleaching India ink. Look at it as Marvin must look at it, Mr. Harmon. Don't think quite so much about yourself."

"By Jove!" A slow flush mounted into Eddie's cheeks. He blinked his eyes. Portia had some tongue, and the most disconcerting way of hitting a fellow when he wasn't looking. Still—she was right. Hang it, she was right. There was something to be said on the other side of the affair. Marvin had even hinted at it in the beginning of his story of the thing this evening. And, of course, Portia had seen it. She had a sort of logical head. She was some lawyer—some little lawyer. For a girl she was—immense.

"Of course, they don't know me from Adam—and of course it's their duty to prevent anything like that. Maybe I have been too self-centered, Miss Elton, though naturally until now I have been mainly concerned with myself. Still—if that sort of thing got into the wrong hands, it would mean the biggest counterfeiting coup of years. It would—why, Good Lord, it would make the whole country's currency unsafe!"

As he went on, Eddie's interest quickened.

"Exactly," Miss Elton assented. "So you see—"

"What sort of a job Salles and Marvin have on their hands—how careful they've got to be not to make a mistake—and what it meant when Jenkins, thanks to me, let Blumefeldt give him the slip." Eddie spoke quickly at first and then more slowly. "And I see that it took you to make me see it."

"Oh, but—a lawyer is trained to see both sides of a case, Mr. Harmon. They must."

Eddie shook his head. All at once he was very humble and very sincere as he rejoined: "Anybody would have seen that unless he was a boob. They got the three we saw, but the big bird flew out the win-

dow—and he's got both the formula and the Murgson crowd's hundred thousand, and nobody knows where he is, and I helped him get away with it without meaning to do it, but—honestly I wish I knew more about it. I'd like to help get that chap, if I could."

His companion's face softened, became for a moment some way wistful, took on the strange, instinctive, illusive maternal appearance, the face a woman, be she wife or virgin, may sometimes wear. For a time she stared back into Harmon's eager face, his impulsively lighted eyes, and then: "So I didn't judge you wrongly after all, Mr. Harmon," she said. "You have the impulses of an honest man, the man who wants to play the game squarely, to win by his own ability in a strong two-fisted way, not by treachery, or deceit or fraud."

"Of course," Eddie replied. His voice was not entirely steady. Some way such praise from Portia's lips made him feel a trifle odd—was a balm of healing to his sadly wounded pride.

"I'm glad our ideals are the same," she said not slowly nor quickly, but in quietly positive fashion.

"So am I. Honestly Miss Elton, I'm glad to know that is your ideal of a man." With a swiftly purposeful gesture, Eddie put out a hand and covered hers, still lying stretched out toward him on the cloth.

Without any undue haste, but deliberately, she drew free from his touch. "However, we are getting away from the original point of discussion, aren't we? Since the bill is probably Blumefeldt's what are you thinking of doing with it?" she asked.

"I'd like to return it to him," Eddie declared with a touch of double meaning in his voice.

"And—" she seemed to understand all he implied, "what about the other thing he gave you?"

"I'd like to return that—with interest—if I could get the chance."

Miss Elton nodded, smiling.

"I believe you would. But under the conditions, I think you had best let me take this money."

"You?" Harmon questioned.

"Yes. In all my experience I don't be-

never I have ever met quite such a mixed-up affair as this. I think I had better take it and mark it and keep it until the thing is settled. After that, you can do with it what you please."

"Mark it?" Eddie repeated. "You mean keep it as a sort of certified bit of evidence in the case?"

"Certainly. We don't know what unexpected angle the affair will develop next. So far as the police and Marvin are concerned, being a genuine bill, it has no further interest; but—it might be well to be able to produce it as the identical bill that was given to you, provided you should be in any way drawn into the further course of the case."

Eddie nodded. Not only was she beautiful and quickly sympathetic—this little girl lawyer of his—but she was wise. And she believed in safety first, of being prepared, if possible, for contingencies, in advance. He picked up the hundred dollar note and handed it to her.

"That sounds sensible," he declared. "I don't see just what could come up but—I didn't ever expect to get into the thing in the first place."

All at once he grinned. "I just expected to go out this afternoon and see the town and do exactly as I pleased, and the only thing I've done according to my wishes since, is getting you to come here."

"And even that," she told him smiling, as she tucked the bill out of sight in a feminine way of concealment, "depends wholly on your getting mixed up in this mess."

Eddie actually stared. His grin broadened. "By Jove!" he said again. "You know, Miss Elton, when I wanted an attorney I insisted on selecting one myself, and I picked your name and demanded that they call you. I told them I could get the sort of lawyer I wanted, even if I was a stranger in town, and—" he looked straight into the violet eyes across the table, "I was right."

The eyes dropped. A faint pink stole into Miss Elton's face. Neither spoke until suddenly Eddie chuckled: "Marvin and Salles aren't the only ones who would like to find Blumefeldt, I fancy. There's Murgerson and his two pals. What did they get

for their hundred thousand? Nothing—not even a run for their money. Blumefeldt did the running. Did you ever hear of such a—comedy of errors?"

Miss Elton toyed with her food. "Comedy of errors is a good description," she remarked. "And, of course, there are elements of humor in the situation, if you view it right."

"Elements?" said Eddie. "The whole thing's crazy in its action, though; of course, the real situation is serious enough. But look at it, Miss Elton. I come into town a perfect stranger, and—"

"Please—spare me—stranger," she interrupted smiling. "It's perfectly ridiculous, as a matter of fact, if you look at it that way. And now I think I had best be getting home."

Eddie called their waiter. "But—there's the matter of your trouble to be settled first."

"Oh, wait till the thing is finished," Miss Elton said in a wholly unbusinesslike voice.

"A retainer then. Fifty dollars?"

"Will be sufficient." Portia's tone was almost frigid and Eddie wondered at it as he produced a folder, extracted the sum he had mentioned and passed it to her.

"Thank you. I must repeat that your honesty of appearance, Mr. Harmon, is not belied by your deeds."

But her pique, whatever its origin, vanished almost before the waiter had returned with Harmon's change, and a feminine pirate was permitting him to repurchase his hat.

And after that, she was just girl, Eddie thought, as they set out for the apartment where she and another young woman, alone in the world like herself as she confessed, held a tiny suite of rooms. Yes, she was just girl, and all her superiority of professional training and station disappeared. She even gave him a half-humorous account of her personal struggles against the obstacles, of that prejudice which has long reared itself in legal circles against her sex—laughing at some of the episodes she recounted, bridleing again at others in a semi-tolerant wrath.

At the door of her apartment, she listened with a somewhat whimsical expression to

his plea for a subsequent excursion into the night life of the city. She gave him permission to call if he so desired, naming the apartment, its street and number, as well as the address of her office, and Eddie wrote it down. As sometimes happens in the city of the Golden Gate, it was a clear night. There were stars in a blue-black sky, and a moon. Its light shone into the face of the little lawyer, making it white under the mass of her dusky hair and close-fitting little hat.

Eddie glimpsed it. As she stood there with him she seemed just girl, and a very desirable girl indeed. Their meeting had been in a bizarre way almost romantic, and this was a veritable night for romance. He renewed his request concerning a definite date for another meeting. In the end she agreed that he might call at the office and take her to dinner the following evening. He was content, perforce, with that. Indeed, he thought he had done well to win the promise in view of the fact that a few hours prior he hadn't known she existed.

He said good night. Her fingers lay briefly in his palm. He lifted his hat. And then he strode off down the street toward his hotel in a far more complacent mood than any he had known since he had left it that afternoon.

Anyway he was out of jail—that episode was past—and he rather fancied that no matter what Marvin might think, he had not overstated the case in daring the government man to fasten anything upon him.

His breast swelled and he quickened his pace. He walked with head up and shoulders thrown back—free—not with a skulking criminal stride. And behind him, in the pile of brick and terra cotta he had quitted, he left a girl he had never seen until this evening—would never have seen had it not been for the trick fate had played him this afternoon, as she herself had pointed out. Behind him was Portia, as he kept calling her in his mind—that little feminine lawyer he had selected because her name was double-leaded—M. C. Elton. Eddie grinned. Her name was double-leaded all right, in his brain.

And to-morrow evening he was going to take her to dinner, and after that—well—

of course, he'd see her again. She was all girl—just all girl—the sort of girl to catch the fancy of any clean-minded man.

Eddie lifted his face to the stars. It was a wonderful night. And he was free again—as free as he had always been save for a few brief hours inside the last twenty-four—as free as he meant to remain. The thing had been unpleasant while it lasted, but it had been ridiculous, too, as Portia had said, and like toothache, it wasn't so bad when it was over. Eddie grinned once more. Everything was all right. Even Marvin's suggestion that he did not leave the city did not rankle any longer, now that he had met M. C. Elton, and was going to meet her again.

A million stars twinkled overhead. They were sprinkled like a scintillating frosting on the sable robes of night. They winked and blinked above him. The night air held a wild salt tang. And the moonlight bathed him as he strode along the pavements. He recalled how it had bathed the face of Portia, not long since. There was the night and the stars, and the moon, and her, and—himself. To-morrow he would take her to dinner and after that—well—that was up to him.

So the world seemed a very pleasant—even a promising thing to Eddie as he walked along a street where the slanting shadows of the fringing houses were thrown in inky purple outline across the pavements, by the moon.

By and by the lines of a stanza he had once read, where or how he didn't just remember—crept into his mind:

The night has a thousand eyes
And the day but one—

He repeated them slowly. They fitted the occasion. Portia had violet eyes with dark-lashed fringes. And the eye of the day was the sun. That wasn't quite right though, really. The Oriental had it better when they called a budded woman a full moon. That was more romantic—more poetical. The moon. It hinted at so many things that the sun robbed of their illusion. Still—how did the rest of the stanza go?

"But the light of a whole world dies—the light of a whole world—"

How the dickens did it finish? Dies—dies—with— With what? There was something about the setting of the sun. That was the idea but—just how did the poet express it? It was of no consequence, but Eddie endeavored to recall it as one will—trying a half dozen groupings of words to complete the couplet and embrace the contained conception.

And then—all at once—seemingly that last line materialized in concrete form. Seemingly it took the shape of a blackjack

or some other similar object. It seemed to rise up out of the nothingness of a shadow and hit him behind the ear.

Eddie saw more stars in more varied constellations than are contained in either the heavens or a text book. They flared in scintillating orbits, flamed briefly and vanished.

Without intending to do so, he sank down with his back against the supporting substance of a private fence. And then blackness rose up and engulfed him.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

U U U

LIFE, AS IT IS

BELLA had a pretty face,
Stockings shiny, frills of lace,
Hers, at will, charms to enhance,
As she whirled from show to dance.

Maggie's skin was dull as dough,
So she had to scrub and sew,
Working early, working late,
With no time to decorate.

Bella ate *hors d'œuvres*, and dipped
Fingers, dainty and pink tipped,
Into bowls of scented water,
As her reading books had taught her,

Maggie, coming home at night,
Crawled to bed—she was a sight—
Working hard for meat and bread,
Fear of idleness her dread.

Years went on. Bell's pretty face
Lost its beauty, and her grace
Melted into fat, that rolled
Into chins, as she grew old.

Maggie, too, time changed a lot;
How I'd like to say 'twas not
For the worse! But, truth compels—
Maggie's looks went off like Bell's.

Yet, Bell's fingers still were white,
Cold creamed was her face each night;
For, although she'd not a penny,
Sister Mag had saved up many.

'And, by drudging for the beauty,
Never shirking task or duty,
She could still keep Bella's face,
Once so pretty, set in lace.

Helen E. Haskell.



Spikes and Six-Guns

By HAROLD de POLO

IT was the proud boast of the Triple Star boys that they had the best bunk-house, the best grub, and the best boss, in the whole wide State of Texas. A visitor dropping in during the evening, too, would have agreed, for fun and good fellowship were certainly rampant. To-night, however, you could have cut the gloom with a butter-knife.

"An' only yesterday she lets me hold her hand," Freckles O'Ryan sighed, lugubriously breaking the silence.

"That's some cheaper'n puttin' a ring on it," put in Ed Manney, the confirmed cynic and woman hater.

The other paid no attention, but the rest of the bunch did. The nearest jabbed a

spur into his thigh, another deftly flicked a burning cigarette at him, while the prize gun-wielder looked exceedingly vicious and suggestively reached for his hip. For Freckles, as this intimates, was about the most popular hombre on the ranch.

"Yes," he went on, utterly oblivious of any interruption, "it wasn't no more than yesterday that she lets me hold her hand. Stingin' tarantulas, think of it!"

Still deep and sympathetic silence.

"An' boys, I'll tell yuh more," murmured the stricken man hoarsely. "*She 'even 'lowed me to kiss her fingers!*"

Regardless of the consequence he might suffer, the woman hater could not help snorting. It passed unnoticed, though,

when Deacon Stiles, the paragon of propriety, swore for the first time in history:

"*Damn* baseball! I *allus* hated the game!"

This decidedly relieved the atmosphere. For a fraction of a second there was unbounded surprise, and then there was a roar of derisive laughter in which even Freckles could not refrain from joining.

"An' after all these years," mocked Ed Manney.

"I—I might 'a' termed it different," stammered Deacon, blushing crimson. "But—but—"

"You certainly might have," broke in Tubby Armstrong, the Easterner who never mentioned his past and was supposed to have been a famous athlete. "You should really have blessed the grand old national pastime! Boys, I've just been thinking, and it's going to save us. Baseball, I mean; not my thinking!"

Freckles raised his head, eagerly, hopefully. He knew, as every one else did, that the usually close-lipped puncher never spoke unless he meant business:

"Meanin'?"

"Meaning this. The big boss is a double dyed, copper distilled baseball fanatic—otherwise known as bug or nut—of the worst order. He's so crazy about it that he's invited this minor league team out here to do their spring training, feeding them and bedding them just for the pleasure of watching them practice. It strikes me that on top of this, seeing things are slack now anyway, that he wouldn't mind if we organized a team and did a little playing ourselves. I'm even willing to bet—"

"Hol' on there, Tubby," cried Manney. "Who-all ever put it into *yore* head that we *want* to play?"

Armstrong gave him a look of extreme pity and continued with his usual blandness:

"We want to do what we can do for Freckles, don't we? Well, here's my dope. If Dora, the attractive daughter of our beloved foreman, has fallen for this big stiff of a Rube Hummer who pitches for the Birds, why wouldn't she fall even harder for our own O'Ryan once *he* becomes a moundsman? Especially, too, since she has pre-

viously allowed him to fondle her hand and even go so far as to kiss it. Does my simple strategy register?"

"But I ain't never had a ball in my hands," protested Freckles glumly.

"Nor me!"

"Same here!"

"I ain't either!"

In fact, there was only one man there who could truthfully say that he had ever played, and even at that he had to admit it had been over twenty years before.

"Oh, don't let that worry you, boys," laughed Tubby consolingly. "I'll tell you. I happened to catch a little back in college, so I know something of the game, and I'll gamble I can whip this bunch into pretty decent shape. Of course, we may not put up much of a brand of ball, but we don't have to. To tell you the truth, I don't even *want* us to. I'm well, I'm thinking of showing them what we might call baseball *à la* cowboy. What's the good word? Shall I ask the old man in the morning if we can have a couple of hours off a day for practice? Tell him we want to make him proud of his own boys by showing up these bush leaguers!"

"Go to it, Tubby," they cheered in unison.

"Tubby," added Freckles, "if you'll jest help me get her back I'll—yep, I'll give you my Mexican silver-worked saddle!"

Which, considering that it had been the puncher's prized possession for years, certainly proves what a dub a fellow can be about a girl, eh?

II.

Not only did Tubby receive permission from Old Man Bassett; he received assistance as well. The old gentleman was heartily in favor of the plan, and told the organizer to get together nine men if he had to keep them from work *all* the time. The business of the ranch wasn't rushing, anyway, and what did cattle matter when it came to a ball game? Why, he'd burn up the prairie with his racing roadster, right off, and come back with all the paraphernalia necessary. Go to it! Great idea!

Tubby agreed, a day later, that maybe it was, but it was likewise hard and dis-

couraging work. Back east, he had been rated the best college catcher of his time, and five big tent teams had been after him with offers. You can imagine what he had to go through, therefore, in trying to select eight other men from among about a score who had never even had a mitt on their fingers.

But no manager, no coach, ever had a more willing or earnest band. Cattle was forgotten, poker was neglected, rides to town were given up, swapping lies was given the go-by—everything was cast aside except baseball. They talked it, they ate it, they slept it, they dreamed it—and they worked at it. Tubby certainly made them do the latter, taking them off a couple of miles where they would not be under the eyes of the Birds. In a week, too, he had picked out a team that was about as good as—oh, say about as good as the average small boy aggregation. He realized as well that he could never whip them into a more formidable outfit. But he had one surprise, and that was Freckles.

He had seen speed, had Tubby, and he had caught it, yet he knew that he had never seen the horsehide zip as it did when it came from the puncher's fingers. There wasn't much control, and curves and breaks were nil, but that pellet surely went through the air like a bullet. Also, for every hour that the rest worked, Freckles put in at least three. Even at night in his bunk, it was said, he gripped a baseball and caressed it with his fingers.

News had leaked out by now, and the Birds knew that the Triple Star boys were practicing daily. When this came to Tubby's ears, he openly issued the challenge he had been holding back, making it for the last day of their training.

"Sure," accepted Rube Hummer, taking upon himself the job of spokesman. "We don't mind slaughterin' guys when they come and beg to have it done to 'em."

"Fifty you don't," replied Tubby blandly.

"Easy sugar," said the Rube, hastily shoving out his bills before the other could have a chance to repent.

"Got any more?" pleaded Rabbit Hollister, the shortstop.

"Just thirty-two hard dollars," Tubby told him, counting out the balance of his capital.

"Boy, but don't I wish it was that many hundred," sighed the Rabbit, as he accepted the wager.

"And so do I," chimed in the puncher.

But the Rabbit and the Rube and the rest of the Birds had a chance at some more stray sugar. When the Triple Star boys learned of their catcher's action, they showed their gameness at least. If Tubby could bet on the team, you could take it from them that they could. Royally and loyally, to their last two-bit piece, they flocked to the minor leaguers and were heartily welcomed.

When the old man heard of it, he did some puzzled thinking and made a trip to the bunk house:

"Boys," he said, "I'm right proud of yo're sportin' blood an' all that, but I shore do feel like I ought to warn yuh that these here Birds are ball players that make their *livin'* doin' it. Boys, go easy!"

"Too late, boss," grinned Six-Gun Bates, "we've already done gone an' shot all our wad!"

"Well," sighed the old gentleman, "I'm wishin' yuh luck!"

"So'm I," groaned Freckles, the sigh of the boss disturbing him.

"And we're going to have it," put in Tubby cheerfully.

"I shore hope so," said Old Man Bassett fervently, as he left for the night.

"Come on, Six-Gun, practice that slide a few minutes before we turn in," commanded Tubby. "No, you crazy galoot, *without* the gun!"

Bates obeyed. Wildly, unheeded of his body, he threw himself time after time along the floor. It was a peculiar slide—a slide wherein the chief part seemed to be getting his hand to his hip the instant he struck the ground. After a quarter of an hour of it, he was told to desist till morning.

"From now on, boys," said their catcher and manager, "we work harder. The big game is only three days off, and we want to hit that field in absolutely the old pink of condition. Into the bunks everybody, and up before the sun."

They worked, that next morning, with sentries posted about their field, and even the old man himself was refused admittance. It was an odd sort of practice, inasmuch as it consisted mostly of sliding into the bags. Also, it was punctuated to a remarkable degree by the reports of revolver shots.

"Must be feelin' mighty cocky," mused Bassett, after having been turned away by a guard for the second time. "Hm. Them boys don't waste no lead unless they're feelin' right joyous and hopeful!"

Wherein he was right. Could he have but heard Tubby discoursing that night, he might even have placed a bet on his own boys, baseball expert though he was.

"Boys," the big catcher was saying, "to morrow's the day. We're going in there to win that game, and we're *going* to win it. We're *not* going to win it just because it's a game of ball; we're *not* going to win it just because we have our money up; we're going to win it because we want to show up that big bum of a Rube Hummer and set Freckles O'Ryan back in the good graces of our Dora. And, boys, I guess we win it. Am I right?"

"*You sure are!*"

III.

THE next day, at two-thirty P. M. sharp, the Triple Star aggregation strolled out to the field, and no team in the history of the game ever drew a louder or more hearty laugh. The Birds roared; they screamed; they nearly went into convulsions—for the punchers looked about as much like a ball nine as the professionals looked like cowmen. They came out in full regalia, but it was the regalia of the range. They wore chaps and boots and wide Stetsons, and even their spurs and six-guns were not lacking.

"Jumpin' Mexican beans, boys!" cried Old Man Bassett, rushing wildly toward them. "Yuh—yuh don't come to expect to play ball thataway, do yuh?"

"I know it looks funny," admitted Tubby gravely, "but I've figured it all out. Take our regular clothes from us, and we'd feel so awkward and out of place that we

wouldn't know what to do. No, sir. We'd probably go plumb to pieces! Why, just the same as the Birds, you might say. Get *them* in *these* clothes, for instance—without their spikes, you might put it—and I'll bet they'd be right at sea, too! Oh, no, don't you worry, boss. It's all right!"

The Triple Star boys, then, took the field for their preliminary workout. Tubby got busy batting them out, and the bunch performed creditably. In fact, they couldn't help doing so, for the big catcher put no steam whatsoever behind his stick-work. If anything, he seemed to be trying to send the ball along as easily as he possibly could. For fifteen minutes he continued; then very much according to rule, he gave the field to the visitors, while he and Freckles O'Ryan stepped to the sidelines for the warm-up.

Freckles went through his task lazily, merely lobbing the horsehide over, and there was still more derisive laughter. Even Dora, sitting close to the bench with her father, this time tittered. As for the Birds, the whole thing struck them so funny that they couldn't even continue their workout:

"Come on, let's start the slaughter now, boys," suggested the Rube, walking off.

"You can practice your allotted time or not, just as you like," answered Tubby, "but this game is scheduled for three sharp and we start exactly then!"

At that hour, precisely, the Triple Star boys took up their positions, with Old Man Bassett doing the umpiring. Freckles, undeniably, had all his speed—but alas for his control. Sadly and briefly, he passed the first two men. The next one, however, he got on three healthy strikes, and there was much cheering. As to the fourth batter, he sent up an easy pop fly—a fly for which the shortstop didn't have to move. It came right down into his waiting hands, and it went right out again. That was not all. When he recovered the ball, probably with the idea of tossing to third and stopping the runner from second, he sent the sphere somewhere off in the direction of left field, and by the time it had been returned to Tubby two men had crossed the plate and another was safely resting on the far corner!

Even so, Freckles O'Ryan did not lose his nerve. He tightened his belt and struck out another man. That, as his battery mate had told him, was the only way in which they might be certain of retiring an opponent, for the field was worse than none at all. Before Freckles was able to make a third man take the third swing at the air, though, just four more runs had pattered over the pan!

Briefly, it assuredly *was* slaughter for the next three innings. The Birds had twenty-two runs chalked up to their credit, and the Triple Stars none. Tubby, it is true, had doubled and performed the praiseworthy feat of stealing third, but there he had died. Rube was at his best, and the chances are that he would easily have been able to blank any team in his own league. It was hinted, anyway, that he was to be given a trial by the majors, so what else could you expect in the present situation?

At the end of the fourth, with two of the Triple Stars out, Six-Gun Bates was hit on the shoulder. Frankly, it *did* sort of look as if he might have got in the way of the ball, but as the confident Birds made no mention of this, Old Man Bassett waved him to first. A great shout went up from the punchers, and, as for Six-Gun himself, he went wild with joy. He was considered the crack shot of the ranch, he had won a medal at El Paso for trick target work, but it had not given him more happiness than this. With a wild whoop, he started for first. He did not jog nonchalantly to the cushion, as was his privilege; instead, he leaped along the path like a frightened antelope; and, when some ten feet from the bag, he hurled his body through the air, struck the ground for a crazy looking slide, and emitted another shriek of joy. But this, however, was not all. As his spurs caught in the sack, his right hand must have got mixed up with the trigger. Anyway, a sharp report suddenly rang out—and a little spurt of dust kicked up not a foot behind Rube Hummer's heel!

"Hey, there, you bonehead," he cried, "take off that gat an'—"

He caught himself in time. A laugh came from Dora—a hearty and whole-souled laugh that told him she thought it was

great fun. He got hold of himself, somehow, and managed to stand on his trembling legs. He took a long time in his wind-up, for, as he had twisted his head behind him, he had seen the spot where the bullet had struck. A little closer and he'd have had to look for some other means of a living—and, to the Rube, there was no other way as easy as hurling a baseball. It worried him so, it got on his mind, that he actually passed the next two men on precisely eight balls.

The Triple Star boys now were fiercely jubilant, but Rube Hummer had got himself under better control, and he struck out the next batter. Tubby now was at the plate. The pitcher knew that he was facing a man who had formerly played the game—and one who had played it in good and fast company. He did his mightiest, but his mind *would* insist on dwelling on how close that lead had come. The upshot of it was that he put one right in the middle of the groove, and the big catcher whaled it over the right fielder's head.

Again there was pandemonium. Although it was a clean home run, the three punchers on the sacks started madly for the plate. The one on third must have been a poor runner, and the one on second just a little better, while the one on first must have been a wizard; for, somehow, they all arrived at the platter at the same instant. When they did, too, more difficulties arose. Once more, it seemed it was due to spurs. Anyway, they all come down in a heap; and when they did, the same thing happened to the three of them that had happened to Six-Gun. *Three* reports sounded—and *three* little dust clouds kicked up about the feet of Rube Hummer.

"Dammit," he cried, "they're tryin' to murder me!"

Although Dora's laugh was not any quieter than before, the pitcher did not hear it. He shrieked out his words almost hysterically. He did more. He stuck his hands in the air and dug his spikes into the ground. He could run, could the Rube, but he never had run, and never will again, as he did then.

"They're tryin' to kill me," he kept yelling; "they're tryin' to murder me!"

He wasn't the only one who thought so. Most of the players were edging away, and only Lanier, the manager, and a young substitute, stayed to face the music.

"Look here, Mr. Bassett," complained Lanier, "you're the umpire here, an' you gotter hand us a fair deal. I get your game now, all right. You want these damn fools to win, an' you set 'em up to this gun work. I gotcha, all right!"

Therein, he made a mistake. The old man was a dead game sport. He was frankly not in sympathy with his men, although he knew they wouldn't harm any of the Birds, but he decidedly did not like the other's accusation of his being crooked.

"Mr. Lanier," he said, "I reckon y'u don't mean them strong words!"

"I don't, heh?" yelled the other, still angry. "Well, I certainly do! You make them idiots take off their guns or I don't play this game out!"

"Hold on," interrupted Tubby, "but I don't think it's up to you or any one else to name our costumes. We're playing here just the same as you are, in our working clothes, for we use spurs and six-shooters when we're riding range, the same as you use spikes when you play ball. We haven't hurt any of you, anyway, and—ah—and little accidents like a six-gun going off *will* happen!"

"Yeah?" snarled the catcher of the Birds from fifty feet off. "Well, bo, *I ain't* gonna play no more—an' that's flat!"

Tubby eyed him blandly, and smiled. Then, bravely, he turned to the old man.

"As umpire, Mr. Bassett," he said, "I ask you to forfeit the game to us if they refuse to take the field within five minutes by the technical score of 9 to 0!"

"You betcha he can forfeit it" put in Lanier. "What do *I* care for—"

"Forfeit it your neck!" cried Rabbit Hollister. "Ain't I got thirty-two berries up?"

This drew most of the Birds back within arguing radius, but it did not bring the Rube. They had their money up, they did, and they weren't going to be buncoed out of it. They'd quit the game right now, all right, but they didn't want any of this 9 to 0 stuff. What did he take them for, a bunch of dubs?

"Mr. Lanier, suh," was the old man's

ultimatum, "them five minutes are now startin', an' onless you-all take the fiel' befo' they run out I'm statin' that I'm forfeitin' the game to the Triple Stars by the score o' 9 to 0. In the beginnin', I don't do no recallin' that we-all made any partic'lar rules. No, suh; I'm right *positive* in assertin' that you-all didn't do no puttin' in any kind o' 'buts' about costumes!"

"Damn the game! You can have it by 900 to 0," yelled the minor league manager. "But my boys ain't payin' no bets, though!"

"I think they will," commented Tubby, sweetly. "Hey, Six-Gun!"

"Shore," said Six-Gun Bates, stifling a yawn with his left hand while his right played at his hip. "I know they will!"

Briefly, there was much more arguing, but Old Man Bassett stood there, time-piece in hand, as if he were not hearing a word of it.

At last he raised his head.

"Takin' the field, Mr. Lanier?"

"We ain't—an' we ain't payin'—"

"Game forfeited to Triple Stars—9 to 0," snapped the old rancher, and stepped briskly off the field.

"You happen to be the stakeholder, Mr. Lanier," Tubby reminded him; "and don't you think you'd better hand over the spoils?"

"Shore," put in Six-Gun before the other had a chance to reply, "I can *tell* he thinks so!"

The professional athlete purpled, doubled his fist, opened his mouth—and then closed it. He looked at that circle of range riders, and he looked at the wilted faces of his own men. Then, suddenly, he stuck his hand into his pocket, yanked out a huge roll of bills, and thrust them roughly at Tubby.

"Take it you—"

"Careful," warned Tubby just in time.

Lanier walked away. When he had gone some dozen yards he turned, his face swollen with wrath.

"An' you call that *baseball*, heh?"

"Well," drawled Tubby, "if you don't happen to like the plain and unadulterated term, you might call it *baseball à la cowboy*!"

Freckles O'Ryan was rather late in getting to the bunk house that evening, but all the boys, nevertheless, were waiting up for him. They knew when he was coming, too, for they heard his rollicking barytone a good hundred yards off. He did not cease singing either, when he made his entrance. Instead, he went to his bunk, got out his banjo, and gave them the type of concert he had been wont to give them before the advent of the Birds. During a lull in it, caused by the breaking of a string, Ed Manney could hold back no longer.

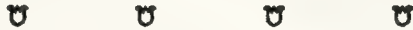
"Well," he said, with a shake of his

head and a cynical leer, "I reckon y'u kissed her other hand to-night, huh?"

For once, the sophisticated woman hater did not draw fire, because most of the boys were about as anxious as he was.

Freckles O'Ryan completed the task of replacing a broken string, then he raised a face that was all grin.

"Her hand, heh?" he laughed blissfully. "Say, is that where yuh think a hombre that's engaged kisses her? No, sir; I'm goin' to hit for town in the mornin' an' buy the ring with the money I won on the ball game!"



GOOD TIMBER

THE tree that never had to fight
 For sun and sky and air and light,
 That stood out in the open plain
 And always got its share of rain,
 Never became a mighty king,
 But lived and died a scrubby thing.

The man who never had to toil,
 Up springing from the common soil,
 Who never had to win his share
 Of sun and sky and light and air,
 Never became a rugged man,
 But lived and died as he began.

Fine timber does not grow in ease;
 The stronger wind, the sturdier trees;
 The farther sky, the greater length;
 The more the blow, the more the strength;
 By sun and storm, by rain and snows,
 In tree or man, good timber grows.

Where thickest stands the wooded growth
 We find the patriarchs of both;
 And they hold converse with the stars
 Whose shattered branches show the scars
 Of many winds and of much strife—
 This is the well-known law of life.

Carlos C. Hanks.



The Roaring Forties.

By ARTHUR HUNT CHUTE

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PARTS I and II.

IN the days of the clipper ship, in the middle of the last century, Donald MacKay, famous ship-builder, designs the *Valkyrie*, which is to be the fastest ship in the world. Although Bully Forbes, a skipper who holds many an ocean record, loses ownership of the new vessel through misfortune, he agrees to sail her for the new owners, Nathanael Gertridge, a skinflint, and his son, Nat.

Mary Williston, niece of MacKay, presents Captain Forbes with a scarlet burgee to fly at his main truck, and makes the acquaintance of young Richard Dunbar, his mate. Nat Gertridge is not pleased at the girl's liking for Dunbar, and spies upon them before the *Valkyrie* is launched at Newburyport. Just before the vessel is due to sail from Boston Nat brings about Dunbar's discharge as mate, but Forbes intervenes and restores him to his post. The vessel sails with a choice crew of "packet rats," sent aboard by Nat, and Dunbar finds a spirit of revolt on board that flames into mutiny in his watch. He is injured by a mutineer. Forbes quells the uprising by stern measures, and later, in a fit of temper, replaces Dunbar as first officer with Pugsley, the brutal second mate.

CHAPTER XIX.

"CRACK ON THE DIMITY"

WITH the change of officers, a change of weather. Captain Forbes took a spell below to look at the barometer. When he again came on deck, he was snapping his fingers in exulta-

tion. At last, after an unheard of duration of calm, the barometer was falling.

At noon the *Valkyrie* was idling over a sea of glass, hardly logging a couple of knots an hour.

Almost instantaneously with the breaking of the first officer signs of wind appeared. With the weather making, the

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captain was not slow to remark upon the fact.

"Best thing I ever did, Mr. Dunbar, was shifting you back to second," he taunted, in sarcastic tone. "I don't know what's the matter with you, according to your name you ought to be a smart officer. But a paralytic could almost show you up. For God's sake, just see if you can't put a little gyp into your watch, and remember this is a clipper-ship, not a hay-wagon."

Broken in rank, crippled in body, things certainly looked black for Richard Dunbar. But he was no quitter, he was a sport right through.

The glass was falling rapidly, and the wind was making.

Every time the old man went below he came up with increasing satisfaction.

By three o'clock a stiff breeze had sprung up. On the sky-stabbing main truck the scarlet burgee was beating out as flat as a board, the highflyer was a magic sign aboard Valkyrie.

Captain Forbes in the brief period of the afternoon watch presented the spectacle of a man, recreated, born anew. The old Forbes vanished with the calm. Another Forbes came with the gale. Gone the surly, misanthropic scowl, in its place appeared the rapt expression of one whose great day at last was dawning.

Before the afternoon watch was over, every stitch of canvas that they carried was shaken out. Night coming on, before its time, beheld Valkyrie racing over a maddening ocean, under a lurid sky. Day went out too soon, as though chased away in terror before the wildering dark.

There was no twilight glow, as Richard Dunbar came on for the night watch.

"Only just past eight bells, and already it's as black as the inside of a boot. We're in for it," said the boson.

The breeze had now grown to half a gale, the wind music in the shrouds, and the eternal roar of the scuppers sounded to the ears of Captain Forbes as sweetest music.

The Valkyrie in the squalls, under her tremendous pressure, went over and over, until in the fiercest moments the seas were foaming level with her hatches. Forward

of the midship house, it was unlivable with bursting seas. The tall skysail poles were bent like coaching whips.

Gazing aloft at this awe inspiring sight, Pugsley felt the qualms of caution. But there was no caution in the heart of Bully Forbes. With the eye of one who knew, he studied Valkyrie's every lift and plunge. As the gale grew in fury his delight in his new clipper knew no bounds.

Forgetting the grim taciturnity, the flood gates of speech were at last loosed. He paced up and down talking aloud to the soaring clipper, in the tones that some gallant might have used to his lady love.

"Ah, this is to your liking, my lass. I can see that now. You had me vexed at the start. But that was because I didn't understand you.

"It's not light air ghosting that your heart was made for. No, like all the rest of Donald MacKay's lovely lasses, you were made to ride the gales. Your top-hamper was not for kissing zephyrs."

Forbes was gazing aloft at the soaring yards and rigging where the gale shrieked and whistled. At last he exclaimed in ecstasy:

"Yes, by Jove, I believe that Donald MacKay has done it. Here's a top-hamper that'll stand the strain."

When a squall of exceptional fury sent the poop plunging, the old man would grab the mizzen shrouds. Every lift and dive of the hull, every pull and give of the gear was studied by him with an artist's eye.

Driving into a heavy head sea, the Valkyrie buried her long sharp bows in a smother of magic foam, blinding the decks in a curtain of spray. Forbes was beside himself in joy at the new found beauties of his clipper. In tones of adoration he spoke again:

"Who says she's overhatted now!

"Who says she's too sharp now!"

The skipper raised his voice, as though he strove to reach old Gertridge, and all the rest of those taunting gentlemen ashore.

"Aye, we had to fight for you, me'lass, but you're worth it all."

Captain Forbes had not slept in his bunk since the anchor was hove up in Boston Harbor. He had snatched winks of fitful

slumber on the cabin sky light. At length, with the gale increasing, and with the glass still falling, he exclaimed to his first officer:

"I'm going down to my cabin now for a sleep. Call me if the weather moderates."

CHAPTER XX.

THE FASTEST IN THE WORLD.

A SNORTING Western ocean gale had set in earnest. The Valkyrie, on her best point of sailing, with the wind two points abaft the beam, was reeling off close to sixteen knots an hour.

"Hard to beat that, sir," observed Pugsley, to the captain with satisfaction.

"Umph, judging by the way the barometer's pumping, this blow hasn't really started yet. Wait till we get to the top of the gale, and I'll bet you a beaver hat she'll be doing twenty knots on a bowline."

With the coming of dawn, Valkyrie appeared more like a half-tide rock than a merchant vessel. Putting her lee scuppers into a seething mass of foam, she fairly boiled along, her cat-head buried beneath a mountain of gray, green water. Harder than ever blew the wind, and the seas came rolling along in vast, sloping hills, as high as the topsail yards. The wind sounded with a high unending roar.

Standing in the lee of the wheel box, looking astern, the mate observed that the gulls, the strongest birds that fly, were unable to make headway, but kept close down in the trough of the swells.

"It's some day," he muttered to himself, "when the gulls can't fly to windward, and yet by God here we are still hanging on to our main skysail!"

Pugsley shook his head dubiously. "We'll all be in the belly of hell if he keeps crackling on this way."

At the change of the watches, Dunbar took his men from one end of the clipper to the other, and made them put a watch-tackle on all the braces and sheets, and haul them taut as fiddle strings.

Once, when they were "sweating up" the lee fore brace, all hands came near being washed overboard. They were bending their backs on the brace, when the Valkyrie,

went over on her beam ends, and a solid green sea broke across her rail. It took all hands clean off their feet and those near the rail, with only a little slack on the brace, were held down so that the sea broke fully two feet over their heads. By watching their chance they hauled the brace tight, and were heartily glad when they heard the last order, "Belay."

It was getting so furious that it was dangerous to go out on the lee side at all, for the wind hove the Valkyrie over every time she rose to the summit of a sea.

The captain's eye was ever on the main royal yard, gauging its resistance to the utmost, and always venturing to that utmost.

After breakfast, Forbes treated all hands to a hair-raising exhibition on his own account. According to custom, he went out on the swinging boom, when the lower stunsail was set, and calmly surveyed his ship from the boom end!

The proceeding was startling indeed. If the man at the wheel brought the clipper a point or two nearer to the wind, Forbes would have been flung to the sea. But without a tremor, the exultant skipper hung on to his perilous perch, viewing his ship as calmly as though he sat in a cabin arm-chair.

A few minutes later, without mishap, he swung himself back again upon the deck. Such devil-may-care actions were second nature to Bully Forbes. On his cabin bulk-head was emblazoned his motto: "The bold man seldom gets hurt." He himself was the living embodiment of that motto.

By midday, the gale from the northwest had grown to a hurricane, so terrifying that even the redoubtable skipper had been forced to shorten canvas. In the height of the blow, the Valkyrie was scudding under topsails and foresail only, at the rate of eighteen knots an hour. With heavy hail squalls and high seas running, it had become a grim battle for the crew, but Forbes drove them to their last breath.

Just as the mate began to thank God that the blow was abating, the captain sang out: "Shake out your to'gallantsails, mister."

The astounded mate could not refrain from an exclamation of dismay.

"What?"

"To'gallantsails, and royals," thundered the skipper in reply.

Pugsley could not choose but obey.

Going aloft against the terrific blow was a laborious process. Owing to the tremendous wind, the hands going aloft were pressed against the shrouds until the breath was nigh gone from them, while their sou'westers threatened to choke them, as the gale tugged beneath their throat bands.

When, after infinite peril, the topgallant sails had been set again, the mate once more was moved to plead for caution. In order to save his own skin, he approached the captain like a suppliant:

"That's too much. I think, sir, we ought to reduce canvas."

In scornful tones the captain answered: "Get the royals on her again, I tell you, then the small skysail, and if you can't find anything else to hang out, after that, go down and see if Mrs. Pugsley won't lend you her petticoat."

All the rest of that day, Forbes carried on in most amazing fashion. Every man aboard, except the skipper, was waiting momentarily for the crack of spars, and the sound of bursting canvas. But hour after hour, though incredibly driven, the gear aloft held out against the fiercest strain.

During the afternoon another clipper was picked up, also bound to the eastward, under reefed topsails, while the Valkyrie was hanging on to everything up to studding-sails, and main skysail. The lookout sighted the other vessel at one o'clock, by two the Valkyrie had come up with her. By three o'clock she had passed her hull down over the horizon.

Late that afternoon, running before a strong westerly gale, Valkyrie overhauled a wallowing, side-wheel paddle-steamer of the Cunard line, bound for Liverpool.

As Valkyrie ranged along side of the Cunarder, the crew of the clipper burst into a chorus of derisive yells, while Forbes held out the bight of a rope mockingly as though to invite them to accept a tow.

"Stew-pot!"

"Tea-kettle!"

"Floatin' junk shop!"

These were among the choice epithets

hurled at the Cunarder. One blatant son of Paradise Alley, aboard the Valkyrie, promised to report the bloomin' sauce-pan by Sunday week at Liverpool.

To show his contempt as a sailor for such ungainly contraptions, Forbes immediately passed ahead of the wallowing liner, put his helm down, and brought his yards on the back stays.

As the Valkyrie came up to the wind, she lay right over, until the amazed crew of the liner could almost see her keel, and momentarily expected her to capsize, or her masts to go overboard. But the MacKay crack bore this daring maneuver in most gallant manner, and though her rail was fathoms deep in the scud to leeward, she never strained a rope yarn.

Having crossed the steamer's bows, Forbes rounded too close under her stern, then squared his yards and raced ahead again.

To overtake or pass a steamer was enough for the highly tensed nerves of Valkyrie's crew. This sailing round a vessel was quite too much.

"That's asking for it!"

"It's tempting Providence too far!"

"The old man's gone daft crazy!"

The idea that the old man had grown demented was steadily increasing, while the strain of the awful driving began to tell upon the crew. Twice during the night they attempted to shorten sail, and on both occasions Forbes appeared with his derringer in hand.

Pugsley was obviously beside himself, but he dared not make a move on his own account, since he feared the captain still more than the death that rode upon the gale.

Richard Dunbar, in his reduced position, half crippled from the pain of his back, was nevertheless in his element. While the Valkyrie fairly leaped and quivered in the wind, Richard found his heart in tune with her every movement. If she had appeared to him wonderful before, now in the gale she seemed almost divine.

Encountering his reduced first officer, on the poop, Captain Forbes noticed the gleam in his eye. For the first time since Dunbar's disgrace, he paused to exchange a pleasant word.

"What do you think of her now?"

"We may be in hell in a minute," answered Richard, "but I wouldn't be elsewhere for thousands."

"Bravo!" exclaimed Forbes, unbending for an instant, then checking himself, he was back again on his weather side, aloof, inscrutable as ever.

In his bitterness at his reduced position, Dunbar for a time had loathed the sight of the ruthless skipper, just as he loathed the sight of Bucko Pugsley. But now he saw the difference.

"Yes, he's a man," said Dunbar with a sudden burst of admiration as he gazed upon Captain Forbes, pacing up and down like a king upon his poop. Every hand before the mast was paralyzed with fear. Pugsley was with them in his dread. When all others quailed, there on the weather side was one whose spirit, in keeping with Valkyrie, was invincible.

Dunbar looked at the gallant clipper riding upon the gales, like some archangel of a tempest; then he looked again at the impetuous tossing head, and the imperious movements of the skipper.

"They're two of a kind," he said to himself. "Each of 'em was made for the other."

The long period of calm which they had left behind was but a prelude to a longer period of snoring Western ocean weather. Each day the log of the Valkyrie was entered with increasing satisfaction.

On February 24 it was three hundred and twelve miles; on the 25th, two hundred and eighty-five miles; on the 26th, two hundred and seventy-five miles; on the 27th, two hundred and sixty miles.

On the last day of February the Valkyrie was in latitude 52° 33' north, longitude 22° 45' west. The wind which had been from the west veered until a strong southerly gale was piping up in earnest.

In the height of the gale, in the afternoon, carrying on like mad, his crew almost beside themselves, Valkyrie logged twenty-one knots in one hour, with her lee rail under, and her rigging slack, it was small wonder that Bucko Pugsley finally decided that the old man had gone entirely daft. With this, Pugsley took it on himself to give the

order to shorten sail. But even before the anxious crew could leap to do his bidding, Forbes, like the Nemesis of Doom, appeared, silent and threatening.

"Did I hear you give an order, mister?"

"Yes, sir, but it's countermanded."

During the night with a report like a gun the foretopsail and jib carried away. At this dread alarm all hands came scrambling on deck, expecting that the last moment had arrived. Instead they found Captain Forbes upon the poop, defying the gales, as imperturbable as ever. During that day and night of awful driving, never for one instant did the captain loose his iron hold upon his ship, or upon his men.

The position at noon, from noon of the previous day, gave a run of four hundred and thirty-six nautical miles, the greatest day's work ever accomplished by a sailing ship. This in the year 1854.

Richard Dunbar as he gazed upon the log that day felt certain that this entry would pass into history, a sailing record for all time. As one who loved Valkyrie, he gloried in her triumph. But behind the fame of the clipper, instinctively his heart paid tribute to that one man, upon the weather poop, who had carved this record out of roaring, shrieking chaos, the patrician and the master.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE WOOD BUTCHERS OF LIVERPOOL.

A NIGHT of infinite stars, reflecting itself in the black sheen of the Mersey.

Midnight had just gone from the great clock at the Salthouse Docks. The booming tones answered by the note of ships' bells, faint and far.

Richard Dunbar, pacing the deck of the Valkyrie, gazed at the limpid flood, thinking wistfully of another night when moonlight on the water had been for him as the path to fairyland.

There was a soothing softness, with springtime in the air. Liverpool and the Mersey alike were sleeping. All were at rest, all except Richard Dunbar, who paced up and down, up and down, like a man beside himself.

Richard had been thinking of that last night with Mary, sailing in her yacht on an enchanted sea.

With soft suggestion of the moonlight he seemed to see again that wonderful girl, bursting upon him from the lilacs. He felt once more that thrill, as she clung to him so tightly, so trustfully.

Like some elusive creature Mary seemed to flit away. Now, far above and beyond him, he beheld the girl of his dreams, steering the *Alcala*, with the touch of the divine. And now she seemed to come to him again as he saw those eyes of love that filled with tears beside the gate at parting.

While his heart was warming with a great glow at this fond glimpse, that other haunting picture came down suddenly between him and his vision, like a curtain of disenchantment—Mary Williston on the arm of Nat Gertridge, waving him *adieu*.

It was this last glimpse that broke for Richard the magic of the night, and rendered the peace of the Mersey a mockery, in contrast to the turbulence that raged within.

In action at sea he had been able to drown all thoughts of love. But now with the inactivity ashore, his thoughts were always wandering, Mary Williston was always calling. Even in his dreams her presence followed him, imploring him to leave the Valkyrie, to come back to her.

He had left her at the gate, speaking lightly of the silks that he would send from China. But now, even the Atlantic between them seemed more than he could bear.

Homesickness had not been one of Richard's failings; his was the roving nature. The Dunbars took to the adventure trail as naturally as the Gertridges took to the counting house stool. But to-night something was pulling at his heart strings.

The harassing thought of Richard came through a word dropped by the stolid Pugsley. This word had conjured up like a nightmare that last glimpse of Nat and Mary together as he sailed away. Richard had hoped for a letter from Mary. He had been counting the days for that letter. He felt sure that she could not forget him, and that a message would be forthcoming. In this he was disappointed.

With the arrival of the American packet all the others had received their letters. Pugsley had the gossip from Newburyport, which at first he took pains to keep to himself, with tantalizing meanness.

"You heard from home?" inquired Dunbar.

"Yes."

Richard smoked his pipe expectantly. There was a question he was burning to ask, but with his wonted reticence he waited.

Pugsley enjoyed keeping the other guessing, so he took out his precious missive, and read it over in silence, chuckling at certain passages. Richard was consumed to know what rumors might be there, but he considered it beneath him to address familiar questions to this interloper.

Finally Pugsley could no longer hold back the gossip that had been dished up to him with enticing savour.

"I reckon things have been movin' in the old burg since we fellers left."

"How's that?"

"Well, listen to this."

Pugsley picked up his sister's letter and read the snatches that had caused him to chuckle.

"You might be interested to know that Nat Gertridge, Jr., your young boss, is getting on fine in the business. He took over from Nathanael, Sr., lately, and it's a great name he's going to be making for himself.

"They appointed him a warden in the Old North Church last Sunday. He's walking right in his father's footsteps, does everything just right, no foolishness about him, not even to wasting money. He passes the collection plate to us every Sunday, and Liz and I always say how handsome he is, such fine eyes. All the girls is crazy about him, and no wonder, him the biggest catch in Newburyport.

"Most fellows in his place would be doing a lot of mashing, but not him. He's awful respectable. Just got his eye out for one person, that's that Widow Williston's girl, the outlandish one who's always doing them manish tricks, such as sailing boats, and the like. I don't see what young Nat can find in such as her, but there ain't no counting for tastes.

"Well, Bill, he's going right after that there Williston kid, just like he goes after business.

"Liz says she's sure he'll be chasing lots more girls before he's through. But I knows better. You never seen a Gertridge start out

for something and then stop, or turn around. No, I'm no fool when it comes to reading signs, I'm married, and Liz ain't, and I knows how things is going. So you remember what I tells you before you fellows is back from China, your young boss will be spliced up to that there Mary Williston, and the pair of 'em will be living in the new home that Nat is now building on the North Foreland."

The reading of Mag's letter had been to Dunbar like the knell of doom. Bursting out of the stuffy cabin, where suddenly the air was suffocating, he came into the enchanted moonlight.

Such a night upon the Mersey, with the balm of spring upon the air, could conjure up one picture only. In a twinkling he was back again at Newburyport in bliss. At one moment, with Mary he was on the heights, then he was plunged again into the deep abyss.

As Richard Dunbar paced the deck of the Valkyrie that night, all desire seemed to fail, while even the incomparable clipper in his eyes appeared to grow base and vile.

What had that ship meant to him? Nothing but disappointment and disgrace. Mary had spoken of the clipper's bad luck—she had certainly spelled bad luck for him. He had gone out on the Valkyrie with highest hopes, only to be broken and reduced beneath a bluenose plug ugly.

To be bullied and harried by Pugsley was trying enough. But now ashore, the grasping hand of Gertridge was ever apparent behind his matchless clipper. This constant reminder of the odious owner was execrable to Richard.

No Loss and Great Gain Gertridge could not possess a work of art without profaning it. Despite the record which Donald MacKay's crack had established, the Gertridges in their passion for foreign aid had given orders to their English agents that MacKay's model should be examined by English experts with the view to further improvements.

Captain Forbes argued against this order in vain.

"When misers buy a beauty what else could they do but ruin her?" was his hopeless remark as he finally left the ship and went off to London in despair; while the stolid, unimaginative English designer start-

ed tampering with the clipper's matchless bow. Strange as it might seem, the "wood butchers of Liverpool," as Donald MacKay afterward called them, were allowed to fill in the Valkyrie's bow with slabs of oak sheathing.

This work of the wood butchers had caused Richard Dunbar his first real misgiving. No matter what misfortunes might have fallen upon him his faith remained. But when the Gertridge hand appeared behind the clipper, which he loved as much as life, there came to him a rush of doubts and fears. It was for Richard as though heathen hands were being laid upon his goddess—as though they were stripping from her her halo of enchantment.

With a sudden surge of disgust Richard exclaimed: "The Gertridge pigs own this clipper, and all aboard her, body and soul. What's the use of standing by?"

In answer to this rush of doubts there came to Richard a vision of the Valkyrie outriding the gales, a queen in all the majesty of action. Having lived such glorious crowded hours with this queen his soul cried out for more.

Then there came that other picture of that divine night at Newburyport, and behind all, and beyond all, the beckoning eyes of Mary Williston calling to him, luring him over the darkness, and over the seas.

It had come to a clash between the girl and the ship.

At one moment the Valkyrie spoke to Richard Dunbar with a voice that bade him be faithful unto death. Then that spell was broken by the Gertridge memory, and Richard found himself exclaiming:

"Why should I stick by such as that?"

Divided between the ship and the girl he paced up and down, up and down, fighting his grim battle through.

The reading of Pugsley's letter and the sudden picture of Nat Gertridge, Jr., and his aggressiveness at home, had awakened in the heart of Richard Dunbar a veritable tornado of conflicting passion.

"If I stick by the ship it will not be for Valkyrie, it will be for Gertridge. Shall I be fool enough to go out, to throw my life away for him, and for his ships, while he stays behind to steal the girl I love?"

With that question, Dunbar's mind was at last clear. Before the night ended his decision had been made. While it was still dark, by the light of the cabin lamp, he wrote a letter to Mary Williston with the message:

"I am coming back to you."

CHAPTER XXII.

AT NEWBURYPORT.

NAT GERTRIDGE came to the Williston's home by divine right.

"Nobody else has a look in there when he's 'round," exclaimed a local gallant. This was true, at least, as far as Mrs. Williston was concerned.

Ever since Nat had been a lad in the summer colony he had cultivated a proprietary attitude toward Mary. On her side, the girl was not encouraging, on the contrary, she was frequently perverse. But in Nat's heart there had been a steadfast faith that Mary Williston was his. She might flirt briefly with this or that one. Rivals might have their little day. But in the end, just as the swallows came north in the spring, so Mary must come back to him. This was the conceit of Nat Gertridge, which remained unshaken until the appearance of Richard Dunbar.

With that new interest which he had seen in Mary's eye, his equanimity was upset, as deeply as that of any Gertridge could be upset. In his heart of hearts he knew, of course, that whatever he desired, he could have, because according to the family formula, "He could pay for it."

"Damn that Dunbar, he's only a penniless waster. He's not even worth worrying over. I'll forget him."

Nat repeated this to himself a thousand times, but Mary saw to it that Dunbar, though out of sight, was never out of mind. No matter what Nat might do, no matter what great thing he might say, there was always from Mary some adulatory remark regarding Richard, causing him to appear always in the better light. He was the man of action, and Mary made it plain that it was the man of action she preferred.

"The boy I admire most is he who does

his own adventuring, instead of hiring others to do it for him."

Nat was not too obtuse to miss the point of this remark. On his great day, at the banquet in the mold loft, it was Dunbar who formed the one dark cloud against the background of his triumph.

After his speech, with the praise of the governor, and the cheers of the assembly still echoing in his ears, he had gone home with Mary, exultant. Mary herself on this occasion seemed to be so filled with admiration for his achievement that it emboldened him to do something which he had never attempted before. Nat was never very bold. But this night, with his heart beating high, as they passed beside the gate, he attempted to put his arm around Mary's waist.

Suddenly, the look of interest faded from her face, as she stepped back with cold aloofness.

"You have no right to do that!"

"Why not, Mary?"

"You ought to know," she answered, and without another word left him standing there alone, injured, dazed.

Nat felt for a moment as though he had received an overwhelming blow. But his uncertain mood quickly passed.

With burning resentment, he muttered: "I know who's responsible for this."

As he walked home, his mind was full of scheming. Finally he exclaimed aloud:

"I'll fix his stunts, before I am through. He'll have no chance to pull the wool over Mary Williston's eyes aboard one of our ships."

Events soon played into Nat Gertridge's hands. The temperance ruse worked to perfection. He was congratulating himself on being so easily rid of his rival, when Bully Forbes made his counter move, and Dunbar was reinstated, greatly to the disgust of the young managing director.

After Captain Forbes left the board meeting on the day of the directors' farewell, Nat still strove to have Dunbar ousted. But the weight of the majority was against him.

On the following day, the Valkyrie sailed. Mary Williston, who had been staying at the Parker House with a Newburyport

party, greeted Nat that morning like her former self. For the first time since their falling out by the gate, she consented to go driving with him.

"Where do you want to go?" he inquired as they left the hotel.

"Take me down to see the Valkyrie off."

"Damn the Valkyrie!" muttered Nat.

"Why, what do you mean?"

"I am surprised to hear you talk that way, and one of your own ships too. Where else would we go on such a day? I came down to Boston with Uncle Donald to bid our new clipper good-by. She's our greatest, too. I cannot understand you."

Nat mumbled something to himself, but he turned obediently toward the China docks. For the rest of the drive, Mary outdid herself in her efforts to be sweet and pleasing.

By the time he arrived at the pier, Mary's placating efforts had so prevailed that Nat was happier than he had been for weeks.

He watched Richard Dunbar at his place of duty on the topgallant forecastle head. He heard with joy the note of the windlass. After the anchor was hove up, he continued to watch with increasing relief until the lofty trucks of the Valkyrie were swallowed up amid the maze of shipping down the harbor.

With the Valkyrie at sea, there came for Nat a return of his old days, and his old proprietary manner. He took Mary driving, he took her to the dances. Every Friday he dined at the Willistons' home, and basked in the sunshine of a prospective mother-in-law.

With his old self assurance returning, he ceased to think of the brief nightmare of rivalry.

"Yes, everything is in my favor," he said to himself. "It may have looked bad for a time, but now it's only a matter of waiting."

Shortly after the Valkyrie sailed they had a drive out to the North Foreland, on a Saturday picnic. The Foreland was a place that Mary loved. On this day they also took the mother, and Nat had been so considerate that Mary outdid herself to be pleasant to him in return.

Mary had always been enraptured with

this spot. To-day it appealed to her more wonderfully than ever.

"Oh! oh! but isn't this a perfect place to build a home," she exclaimed, with a merry outburst, as she and Nat stood together on the high promontory looking seaward.

Before the week was up, Nat had purchased the whole estate around the North Foreland, and commenced to build there a home of his own.

When Mary rallied him about this new move, he replied.

"Don't you think I'm getting grown up enough to live away from my parents, by this time? Then when you picked out a place for me, why of course I simply had to take it. What else could I do?"

The ardor with which Nat carried on his new campaign did not pass unobserved.

"Looks as if you'll have a new wedding soon," observed the parson's wife.

"Yes, my dear," replied Dr. Broughton. "And it'll be a good fee for you. The way that Nat keeps company with Mary, and the new home on the Foreland are written in conjunction so plainly that he who runs may read."

All the gossips of Newburyport were putting two and two together. Nat, spurred on by the incentive of Richard Dunbar, lost no opportunity to rush affairs with utmost speed.

"I guess I was too slow before," he told himself. "But they won't find me wasting precious chances again."

The day the news of the arrival of the Valkyrie came to Newburyport, Mary Williston was almost beside herself with delight. Up till then she had successfully concealed her feelings by every artful subterfuge, but with this glorious news, the tell tale light of love came back into her eyes.

"The fastest ship in the world! Oh; Isn't that wonderful! Isn't that wonderful! I knew they'd do it. Just think what a feather this will be in Richard's cap."

"My, don't I wish that I could have been there, with them. Four hundred and thirty six miles in one day! The crew who did that are a crew to be proud of. They'd soon make the Alcala pass out of sight, wouldn't they? My, but it must be great

to be a man, to sail great ships like that. But cheer up, even if I am only a girl, I've got something to be proud of in my flag, haven't I Nat?"

Nat was dumfounded by this sudden outburst. He had suffered the greatest wound of which his nature was capable. His conceit had been rudely shaken.

Every day thereafter, in spite of herself, Mary was continually talking of the Valkyrie, and of her achievement.

At the very mention of the name of that clipper, Nat's jealousy was aroused. But after the first shock, running true to form, he veiled his emotion behind a mask of splendid self control.

With a renewed sense of jeopardy, there came to him a deep, inchoate madness, not the madness of the heart that acts on impulse, but the latent madness of the mind that waits with calculating scheming.

After his departure from the Williston home one night, Nat burst out.

"Valkyrie! Valkyrie! I wish I'd never heard the name. That's the ship that was going to make me solid with Mary, and now it seems to have ruined me with her altogether. I believe that Mary eats, and sleeps, and dreams, with nothing else but that accursed clipper. But I can wait. My time will come."

There followed for Nat many a night of long and calculating scheming. Bill Pug-sley was in his pay for spying and under-hand missions. But this was a job, apparently, that called for vastly more finesse than that of the bluenose bucko.

One morning while Nat Gertridge was still in a quandary, he came into his office, as managing director, to find an offer on his desk to charter a clipper to take a load of machinery iron from Liverpool to Melbourne.

Without a word, Gertridge folded this letter, and placing it in his pocket walked out of his office and down to the Far East Docks, where he summoned the marine superintendent, Captain MacKenzie.

"Captain, what do you consider the worst season for a run to Australia?"

"The summer season, sir."

"Why is that?"

"Because our summer is their winter, to

the south'ard, and a vessel running down her easting at that time strikes the worst of the gales in the roaring forties.

"Down there in the horse latitudes, there's a wild man's wind ablowing all the time. But in the summer season it's just pure undiluted fury. A hard driven ship, at that season, going high into those latitudes, is fairly chucking the devil under the chin.

"I've had my share, sir, against the brave west winds, but the time I was running my easting down in the bad season, was as near to hell with the lid off as I ever want to be."

Nat Gertridge received this information with a touch of satisfaction, but his impassive face told nothing.

Continuing his questions, he asked the marine superintendent:

"What do you think of mining machinery for a cargo?"

"Worst cargo in the world, sir."

"Why?"

"Well, if the stowage is poor, and it generally is in these days of worthless stevedores, you're likely to have some of your cargo breaking adrift in a sea-way, and then there's hell to pay. Machinery iron rolling about inside a vessel in a heavy sea is more than any ship was built for. That's the explanation of many that's gone out and never been heard of.

"A few tons of iron adrift, a hole stove in the hull, and Davy Jones's locker—is their story."

"Then you would say, captain, that the underwriters should be attended to before we take any chance on a charter like this?"

"I most certainly would, sir. You can't be too particular about your insurance in a case like this. A cargo of machinery iron, and the bad season in the high latitudes of the roaring forties! That's a wicked combination!" Captain MacKenzie uttered this last in the eloquence of one who knew the terror of the sea.

On the way back to his office, Nat Gertridge stopped to call on the representative of the firm that handled the underwriting for the Gertridge ships. He was ushered immediately into a private conference with the president, where he arranged for dou-

bling of the insurance already held on the Valkyrie.

Having settled everything regarding the underwriters, he returned to his office, and wrote a reply to the request for a charter, as follows:

TO THE ANTIPODEAN MINING COMPANY.
London:

Dear Sirs—N. L. and G. Gertridge accept your offer for a charter to carry mining machinery to Australia, the run to be made in the swiftest possible time, in order to rush through your cargo for mining purposes.

In case of a record run from Liverpool to Melbourne your company agree to pay a bonus of a hundred guineas for every day under seventy days occupied in the voyage.

We will instruct our agents at Liverpool to put the Valkyrie, the flagship of our fleet, and the fastest ship in the world, at your disposal for this charter forthwith.

(Signed) NATHANIEL GERTRIDGE, JR.,
Managing Director N. L. and G. Gertridge.

Having despatched this communication, Nat closed his desk and went out with the air of a man who had done a fine stroke of business.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"HE'S COMING BACK TO ME."

THAT night Nat Gertridge came to the Williston home with a light heart. The Valkyrie, the disturber of peace, had been settled for.

"Thank God I can pay for my whims," he exclaimed. "Now she can talk about that accursed clipper to her heart's content. It'll worry me no longer."

To his surprise, Nat encountered Mary romping about the parlor, beside herself with joy. There was obviously some new and strange occurrence that had rendered her like a tom-boy just released from school.

Her eyes were dancing, her cheeks flushed, and her spirits bubbling over. Nat regarded her with mingled admiration and wonder.

"What's up?"

Mary's answer was to grasp the dignified young man about the waist, and whirl him around the room in a violent reel.

"This is simply terrible treatment for the

managing director of N. L. & G. Gertridge," laughed Mary.

"Swing me around again," panted Nat, with delight. "You can always do exactly what you want with me, Mary."

"Oh, but wouldn't you be a nice little doggie," and away she burst again into another whirlwind reel.

For a half hour Nat allowed her to gambol, and dance exultantly about the room in one continual and hilarious outburst. The stolid visitor entered into the pranks as fully as his important nature would allow.

When at last Mary sank down panting, and exhausted, on a sofa, he inquired.

"Pray what's it all about?"

"What do you think!"

"Don't ask me."

"Well, can't you guess?"

"You're so glad to see me."

"Of course not, you silly ass."

"All right then, what's all the fireworks for?"

"I have a letter here," said Mary gleefully, holding it up in tantalizing manner. Nat reached for the letter, and it was snatched away again, and concealed in Mary's waist.

"You don't know from whom it is?"

"Of course not. How on earth could I?"

"Well, what do you think—Richard Dunbar is coming back!"

"Coming back! That can't be. He's due to sail for Melbourne on the Valkyrie."

"Oh, no, that's where you're much mistaken."

"What makes you say so?"

"Because this message is from him." Mary held up the letter with a flourish. "That's it, just arrived to-night. He says he's sailing on the next voyage of the Dreadnaught, and won't we be proud to see him, though, after his wonderful voyage aboard the Valkyrie."

Mary paused. For once the Gertridge reserve had been broken down. Nat looked the picture of unutterable chagrin.

"For gracious' sake, whatever is the matter?"

With a mighty effort Nat conquered his feelings, and replied.

"I suppose I'm to blame, Mary, but I must say I never could work up much en-

thusiasm over some of the undependable fellows you pick for friends."

"Undependable, indeed. That's a nice way for you to talk about one of your finest officers."

Nat shook his head dismally. "One of my finest officers? I wish that I could agree with you. But you're mistaken."

Quick to leap to the defence of one whom she admired, Mary's eyes were afire, her cheeks were aflame.

"What do you mean, by making insinuations like that, Nat Gertridge? It's not at all chivalrous. Indeed, I think it's perfectly nasty of you."

"Well, I wouldn't expect you to give me a square deal," replied Nat Gertridge with heat.

"Why?"

"Because you seem to prefer a worthless adventurer, that no one could ever count on, in preference to an old friend, who was the same yesterday and who is the same to-day."

"Now, look here, Nat Gertridge, we may have known each other for years, but even if we have, you simply must not talk to me like that. I think I know a real man when I see him. In order to size him up, I don't need to have him dangling around the whole blessed time."

Nat took the last shot without a whimper, he was used to Mary's whip-lash tongue.

"I think it's simply awful of you, Nat Gertridge, to come in here and talk that way about a brave officer, who because he is far away at sea, faithful to your interests, cannot answer you."

"Faithful to my interests!" Nat laughed with a querulous note. "Faithful to my interests! That just shows you don't know what you're talking about, Mary. When you get crazy about some idol, before you start to fall and worship, it's a pity you wouldn't pause, just to find out the facts about him, whether he's a man, or a worthless cad."

"You've been making a fool of yourself, Mary, ever since that Richard Dunbar went aloft on the Valkyrie, to show off before you like some cheap circus actor."

"That's nice talk from someone who isn't half as strong, or half as brave. Would

you dare to do the simply wonderful things he does?"

"Before you talk so insultingly to a true friend, Mary, it's a pity you don't know why he's coming back. I suppose you're so full of the hero stuff that it never occurred to you to ask why this wretched Dunbar has left his ship, and abandoned his duty. You are rejoiced because he's coming back, but you don't know why?"

"Well, why is he coming?"

"Because he's in disgrace, because he failed miserably as first officer. You're proud of him as one who sailed on our fastest ship. Yes, the Valkyrie made a wonderful run, but it was no thanks to him. He was a failure from the start."

Mary looked as though she were about to interrupt, but Nat continued.

"Before you go off with any more of your half-baked fancies about one of our disgraced and broken officers, just hearken. Here's a letter from Mr. Pugsley, the present first officer of the Valkyrie."

"That coarse, disgusting person!"

"He's a real officer, not a tissue-paper hero. Now listen to what Pugsley says." Nat took from his pocket a letter, and read:

"That fellow Dunbar has turned out to be nothing but a useless bluff, nice looking, and nice dressed, but not worth a damn in a sea way. The minute we got into the rough stuff outside he fell down flat. Halfway across the skipper broke him, and put me in his place. These dude fellers is all right for the ladies, but they ain't worth their salt aboard a clipper. As I says to the skipper, 'That Dunbar feller was nothing but treacle, and molasses.' He's talking of quitting now, so I suppose by the time this letter reaches you, the mother's darlin' will be turning tail for home. Well, we'll be some glad to see the last of the critter aboard the Valkyrie."

Mary was greatly troubled. She despised Pugsley from the very first occasion on which she had seen him. But then Richard had failed. This information was a stunning blow. Her psychic nature intimated that Richard Dunbar was not the worthless failure that Pugsley represented him. Something within told Mary that Richard Dunbar, whatever else he was, was brave, and true. Therefore she waited in faith,

for the light which she felt certain would come with his return.

The next month was for Mary a time of increasing anxiety and suspense. But under it all there was calm confidence in Richard, and the eagerness to see him again. She slept with Richard's letters underneath her pillow, and they were guarded like a priceless treasure.

Each morning on a little calendar at the head of her bed, she checked off the time that yet remained until her happiness. Each night she exclaimed, with satisfaction:

"One day nearer to Richard."

The Dreadnaught was due in New York about the twentieth of the month, but arrived two days before.

Reading the shipping news that evening, Mary's eyes caught the magic words:

"Dreadnaught docked this morning."

"That will mean that Richard will be in Newburyport on to-morrow evening's train, as he said in his letter he was coming straight to me."

On the following evening, Mary was unduly agitated. All through the supper she kept jumping up until her mother exclaimed: "Dear me, but you have got the fidgets, child. What on earth is getting into you lately?"

Mary made no answer. After the evening meal, she put on her cloak, and told Mrs. Williston that she was going out for a short run.

"I'll be back soon, mumsey," she called, as she left the house. Mrs. Williston did not fail to detect the trembling catch in her daughter's voice. Looking after her, she shook her head in dubious manner.

At the railway station, Mary walked up and down, almost beside herself with feverish expectation. She had been waiting, and yearning so greatly for this day. Now, at last, it had come.

"It seems almost too good to be true," she told herself in ecstasy.

Whatever Nat Gertridge might have said, whatever that odious Pugsley person might have insinuated, made no difference now. Her faith in Richard was again supreme.

With a fluttering in her heart, she beheld the train pull into the station, while she gazed intently for that one face for which

she was yearning from all others. But no sign of Richard Dunbar appeared.

CHAPTER XXIV.

NAT'S INNING.

MARY returned home, pale and speechless. She saw no one, greeted no one. Mrs. Williston was sewing as she entered. Under the light of the lamp, the mother read the unmistakable agony upon her daughter's face.

In a moment she had rushed toward her, in alarm, all the mother sympathy going out to her in compassion.

"Why, Mary! Mary! What is it, child?"

"Oh, Mumsie!"

The next instant the girl flung herself into her mother's arms, her grief at last bursting forth in torrential flood. Mrs. Williston silently clasped her to her breast.

What happened in the secret place of Mary's chamber that night was sacred between mother and daughter. Mrs. Williston had always hated the sea, and now this sailor adventurer, who had played so basely by her daughter, seemed to gather up into himself all its fickleness and falseness.

When Mary, after long, feverish tossing, was at last asleep, the mother went to the little dormer window that commanded the harbor, and looked forth to where her enemy stretched, black, cold and ominous.

Mrs. Williston shuddered. "Oh, the hateful sea! Oh, the hateful sea! Will it be forever a curse to me and mine?"

When the good woman turned away from that haunting spectacle without she prayed aloud: "God save my little Mary from the sea, and from the men of the sea, and from all their sorrow."

After that untoward night the name of Richard Dunbar was spoken no more in the Williston home.

For several weeks Mary tossed about in a fever. When at last her splendid constitution triumphed, and she became convalescent, there grew up in her heart a burning sense of wrong and of injustice. He should not have treated her so terribly. Not even the slightest word to explain his lack of faith.

At this thought Mary would often grow too bitter for words.

Mrs. Williston was now more actively than ever in league with Nat, in his purposes toward her daughter.

Mary despised the conceited, self-opinionated Gertridge as much as ever. But during her sickness Nat began to reveal a new side to his nature, a side which she had never thought of before. He was so true, so steadfast, so faithful; against that other rameless one, who had been unstable as water, Nat now appeared as a great rock. His surety just at this moment was a quality for which Mary's heart was craving.

Once when Mary had fully recovered, Mrs. Williston talked with her at length on the subject of choosing a husband.

"You know, mumsie, I want above all else, a man that I can admire."

"Yes, that's all right before the wedding, my dear, but afterward you want something else. Love's young dream may exist on admiration, but afterward many other qualities are essential."

"What are they, mumsie?"

"Well, first and foremost, you want dependability."

"Yes, you are right there, mumsie."

"I'm glad that you can now see clearly on that point, Mary. That's where so many girls get fooled. When you marry a man, you marry for all time, and for that reason you want some one that you can tie up to, that you can rely on."

"But, mumsie, where's romance, without admiration?"

"Ah, but you should admire the right ones. It's so foolish, Mary, for young girls who don't know to get infatuated with wrong persons."

"But if you can't help it?"

"When you have no experience of the world, my dear, when you are utterly ignorant of men, it's easy enough to be like that. But when you are wiser, you get to know what horrible creatures some men really are. Then you ask questions; then you do not throw your heart away for nothing."

"That sounds simply awful, mumsie, it's so cruel, so calculating."

"You get that way when you get older,

my child. I used to be just like you, forever making a hero out of this chap, and that chap, exclaiming: 'Oh, isn't he fascinating? Isn't he perfectly splendid?' Of course they were all gods then. I couldn't endure a hero of mine to have a single weakness. No, not one. They were all perfect.

"But now, Mary, I know the difference. There isn't a man walking that I'd trust. I take them all with a grain of salt."

"Oh, mother!"

"Yes, Mary, that's just exactly the way I feel about the creatures. You put them on a pedestal, I put them under the pedestal, where they belong. It makes me sick, all this admiring stuff, for mere men. Of course they love to have us women making a fuss over them, but they aren't worth it. No, they aren't."

"But you're talking like a cynic!"

"I'm talking like a woman who knows. When you're older, you'll talk like that, too. When you want to admire somebody choose qualities that are dependable, rather than flashy, that are worth while, rather than mere sentiment. That's your mother's advice, my child."

In her first bitterness against the absent Richard there came to Mary a touch of cynicism, heretofore alien to her girlish heart.

Richard had treated her so abominably that she was in receptive mood for all her mother's doubting questions. When the heart of youth within her was still tumbling headlong after its dreams, the pain which she had suffered caused her to pause and ponder.

During these pondering moments, Nat Gertridge began to appear to her in an altogether better light.

"Yes," she said to herself, "what a good, solid, dependable fellow is Nat, after all. I never treated him right. I've always been unfair to him, but he's a true friend, who will last through the years. Yes, he's a friend, with a heart down underneath that can be depended on. Of course we'll never be any more than friends. I don't care what mumsie says, I simply could not marry a man I did not admire.

"But then I must be kinder in the future, because he has been so true."

On his side, Nat felt that things were progressing to his satisfaction. His was the nature of the tortoise, rather than the hare: he might be slow, but he was steady and sure, never veering from one fixed purpose.

"I can wait. I can wait." This was his most oft-repeated sentence.

Others, impetuous, might rush things, but it was the nature of a Gertridge to keep pegging away with dogged determination.

Though Mary spoke no more of Richard Dunbar to her mother, his name would not die out of her heart. As Nat had now become her greatest companion, it was natural for her to talk occasionally to him about her inner feelings.

On such occasions Nat was always diplomatic. He made no more demonstrations against the absent Richard. Indeed, he was now magnanimous in his references.

"Poor fellow! Too bad he had such luck! He was his own worst enemy. It was the wild blood of the Dunbars. He couldn't help it. That kind of blood was bound to make for trouble."

One day Mary's curiosity got the better of her, and she inquired of Nat, point blank, if he knew of Richard's present condition. Nat answered with apparently guarded admissions.

"I've come to see, Mary, that you really like Dunbar; therefore I hate to talk about him."

"Why?"

"Because, in my heart I am sorry for the poor fellow. Perhaps in the past I did him an injustice. I used to get rabid talking about him, on account of you. I was so fearful lest he might lead you off into some foolish infatuation that might cause you pain.

"Now, viewing the thing calmly and in a saner light, I want you to know that I

have nothing but good will toward the poor fellow. Indeed, it was through me that he was reinstated on both occasions."

"How's that?"

"You remember he was fired for his breach of the standing orders of the company."

"Yes."

"Well, I was the one who broke him. And then later, even before Captain Forbes made a request on his behalf, I myself had already given an order for his reinstatement."

As Nat uttered this lie, he was glad that Mary did not have access to the minutes of his board.

"What was the other time you reinstated him?" inquired Mary.

"After he had been broken in England, for drunkenness and inefficiency. He was then absolutely down and out. That was why he wrote you that he was coming home.

"I felt at the time, Mary, like allowing him to face the music. But knowing how much you cared for him, on your account, I gave the order to have him reinstated once more."

"That was awfully good of you, Nat," said Mary, with a sudden surge of gratitude.

"And where is he now?"

"He sailed for Australia on the Val-kyrie."

In spite of the cynicism and bitterness that had been stealing into her heart, Mary felt a sudden thrill at these words.

In one moment she had warmed to Nat Gertridge; in the next instant her blood was quickened by the answer which Nat had given. In that answer Mary seemed to feel the tang of unexpectancy, the lure of the adventure trail.

"He sailed for Australia," she repeated aloud. "It sounds so brave. It sounds like Richard."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK



A WHALE OF A STORY

next week as our Complete Novelette—"The Comedy of Terrors," a business tale of a good natured man who suddenly determines to become hard-boiled—by Joseph Ivers Lawrence, author of the famous "Unbeatable Bates."



Edith in the Seventh Oasis

By **EARL WAYLAND BOWMAN**

"This is the howl of a horn-toad—
When horn-toads were nimble and swift;
But laws we now got won't let them get
'shot,'
And all those poor horn-toads are miffed!"
—Songs of the Sufferin' Seven.

IT was one of the driest afternoons of the season. Two veteran prospectors paused and prepared to rest until evening in the shade of the lone Joshua tree at Arsenic Springs. They were yet a short day's journey from the two hundred and seven souls single street, seven saloon metropolis of Red Bluff, out in the midst of the tremendous desert radiating over the solar plexus of southwestern Nevada.

The two ancient prospectors were "Solemn" Johnson and "Dirty Shirt" Smith; the very same Solemn and the identical Dirty Shirt who discovered the borax mine across the gulch, thereby making Red Bluff inevitable and famous.

For five days Solemn and Dirty Shirt had drifted south by southwest, in the general direction of Red Bluff. After one of their periodical seclusions among the solitudes surrounding Hellfire Basin, near Dead Angel Mountain, they again were questing for alleviation from the inexorable dryness which enveloped the entire apogee of southwestern Nevada and extended beyond the borders of the neighboring mecca of cafeteria worshippers named southern California.

Solemn Johnson flung a blanket down on the ground, dropped face foremost upon it and announced:

"I'm goin' to take a nap!"

"Go on and take it, nobody's carin'!" Dirty Shirt Smith retorted.

A few yards away, Solemn and Dirty Shirt's mouse-colored, long eared burro, christened "Versus," stood dejectedly and idly chewed on a fallen branch. Dirty

Shirt squatted at the base of the tree, his back resting against its trunk.

Silence began to settle over the scene. Heat waves glimmered above the seemingly endless ocean of sand.

Only the mild swish of a little breeze could be heard as it rippled the foliage of the Joshua tree; the gentle sound mingled softly with the crunch of burro teeth when Versus, by accident, struck a knot in the wood she was chewing. Thousands of feet high, in the cloudless sky, a buzzard wheeled in ever-widening loops:

"Good gosh 'mighty!"

Solemn Johnson emitted the agonized yell, humped his back and began clawing desperately at his shirt, in the region of the vertebra, where a chiropractor punches to treat the pleurisy.

"My Gawd, drag it out—"

As if in answer to Solemn's urgent appeal, a small horntoad, possibly two inches in diameter, with serrated edges, slid from under his collar, sped across the back of his neck, leaped lightly to the ground, glanced calmly around and blinked.

"Well, of all things!" Dirty Shirt exclaimed, "who'd 'a' thought she could have got up there that quick?"

Solemn glared at Dirty Shirt.

"I'll kill that cussed horntoad, if you don't take care of her!" he spluttered.

"Here, 'Edith,'" Dirty Shirt called, lifting the horntoad from the blanket, "come here before he gets mad!"

"But of all things!" he repeated, admiringly. "It wasn't two seconds ago I saw Edith start up your pants leg and before you can say 'scat' she comes out at the top of your neck!"

"You saw her start up my pants leg? And didn't interfere?" Solemn choked.

"I saw her start up it," Dirty Shirt grinned, "and in less than a flop and a half of a flea's wing she arrives at the base of your brain! Do you know what I think?" Dirty Shirt spoke now in an awed whisper; "I honestly believe Edith is the fastest horntoad this side of Los Angeles—"

"And do you know what I think?" Solemn broke in. "You fossilized old red-whiskered horntoad chaperon? Well, I think Edith is goin' to be the *deade*st damn

horntoad on both sides of Los Angeles, if you don't keep her tied up when I'm tryin' to take a nap!"

"Don't be so contrary!" Dirty Shirt laughed.

"What do you want to keep a blamed thing like that for, anyhow?" Solemn growled, "the idea of a man your age packin' a horntoad around in his pocket!"

Dirty Shirt flared up at once:

"You know where I got that horntoad?" he replied spiritedly, "I got her out at Dead Angel Mountain!"

"Yes, two months ago," Solemn sneered, "and ever since—"

"And you know why I got her," Dirty Shirt snapped, "you know I got her to cure my indigestion! You know very well that since I've been carryin' Edith, my indigestion ain't bothered me hardly at all. A horntoad's a darned sight better for indigestion than that buckeye you've been packin' for twenty years is for rheumatism!"

"Aw, hell!" Solemn grunted, contemptuously. "There's some sense to a buckeye, but a dadblasted horntoad—"

"You keep your buckeye, and I'll keep my horntoad!" Dirty Shirt interrupted, heatedly. "In addition to Edith curin' my indigestion, I'm goin' to train her to make her the champion runnin' horntoad of the world. I'll show some of them Red Bluff sports what a horntoad that's a streak of greased lightnin' on a race track can do!"

"In future don't train her up my pants leg," Solemn warned ominously. "I'll give you notice to that!"

"Yes," Dirty Shirt flung back, "and when Edith is notorious as the greatest racin' horntoad ever exhibited, you'll be braggin' because you was acquainted with her once and you'll be sneakin' around tryin' to get bets on her! That's what I'm givin' you notice of, you old squinty-eyed centipede squasher!"

Edith merely snuggled in Dirty Shirt's hand while he tickled her ribs.

Red Bluff was in fit mood for horntoad racing when Solemn Johnson and Dirty Shirt Smith the following afternoon approached the front entrance of Saloon Number Seven, popularly known as the

Seventh Oasis. Red Bluff was always in a fit mood for something, especially if it was something unusual and the more unusual the fitter the mood. Particularly was this true in those heterogeneous days previous to the necessity and the invention of home-brew.

People not familiar with the capacity for dryness of the illimitable desert which surrounded Red Bluff, including all seven saloons; the Chinese laundry of Hop Sing; the similar restaurant of Wong Gee, and the livery stable with the colony of pole-cats there-beneath, *ad valorem*, will be hard to convince not only of the total lack of dampness of the desert in question, but also of the almost uncanny willingness of Red Bluff itself to contain moods of virtually endless variety.

How is one to persuade a person who, for instance, has spent most of that person's life in, well, New York or San Diego, perhaps, where my Lady of Ennui proudly displays Ting-a-Ling, her Pekingese pup, in a competitive parade of perfectly perfumed poodles—and gets a kick out of it—how is one to persuade that person that horntoad racing is not a crude, an uncouth and possibly a hazardous indulgence?

The task is hopeless.

As hopeless as the effort to make a free verse architect of Greenwich Village comprehend the essential similarity of a "cat tea," given in the Marcelled Possum Café, herein "Buddy"—the unexpected blue-Maltese son of "Susie"—is guest of honor, and a convention of hand picked centipedes, held in the Seventh Oasis of Red Bluff, across the gulch from the borax mine, far from the stifling fumes of civilization, out in "God's Great Open Spaces" named the desert which fluctuates over the gigantic solar plexus of the unconquerable state of Nevada!

Therefore, if Wong Gee dumps a pan of dishwater out of the kitchen window of Red Bluff's isolated chop-suey foundry, and the dishwater turns into ashes before it reaches the ground, why try to fathom the phenomenon of ultimate dryness?

Surely, something should be left to conjecture!

It may be that such thoughts ran through

Dirty Shirt Smith's mind as he and Solemn Johnson stepped up to the bar in the Seventh Oasis and ordered a pair of tall ones:

"Drink 'em quick, before they dissolve!"

It was an exceptionally dry afternoon. Solemn and Dirty Shirt obeyed Ed Slocum, the thoughtful bartender.

"Do it again!" they murmured.

Dirty Shirt paused, sighed comfortably, took Edith from his pocket and sat her tenderly on the end of the bar:

"Ed," he remarked, "do you know that that's the runnin'est damn horntoad ever discovered?"

Colonel Spilkins and others pressed forward.

"How do you figure that out?" Ed queried politely.

"By observation and trainin'," Dirty Shirt smiled, while Solemn Johnson flushed a dull red. "Yesterday, out at Arsenic Springs, she started at the bottom of Solemn's pants leg—"

"And if she does it again, she dies!" Solemn interrupted ominously.

"She started at the bottom of Solemn's pants leg," Dirty Shirt repeated, "and in exactly two seconds she slid across the mole on the back of his neck!"

The audience eyed Edith with interest, and then an interruption occurred.

"Gentlemen, for the busted shaving mug or anything like that, one small drop of Magic Instantaneous Invisible Fixer—" the speaker stopped suddenly as his eyes rested on Edith. He was a total stranger in Red Bluff, and, unnoticed, had entered the door of Saloon Number Seven.

The others gazed curiously at him. He was a queer looking chap, tall and lean, with faded gray eyes; his whole air breathed sadness and sorrow. In one hand he carried a small black bag, of the sort used by house-to-house peddlers who go about selling stove polish, preparations for mending dishes, furniture varnish, or such similar cheap articles of trade; in the other hand he held a tiny vial of thick colorless liquid.

For a moment there was silence while the total stranger looked wistfully at the horntoad sitting near Dirty Shirt's glass.

"For that reason," Dirty Shirt resumed,

"I estimate Edith to be the suddenest horn-toad there is! She's the derby winner of the horn-toad turf, and I'll back her against any racin' horn-toad in existence! I figure," he went on defiantly, "that Edith can run from one end of this bar to the other in three seconds, flat; in addition, I'm willin' to gamble, unlimited, that there ain't no horn-toad extant that can pass Edith *en route!*"

It was a definite challenge, wide-openly made.

"I—I—beg your pardon!" the total stranger said, timidly, stepping to Dirty Shirt's side, "but are you the proprietor of the horn-toad about which you've been speakin'?"

"I utterly am," Dirty Shirt answered, glancing proudly at Edith; "that's my original horn-toad! Nobody but me has any equity in Edith."

"Edith?" the total stranger echoed, with an odd lift of his brows, "did you say 'Edith' was his name?"

"Edith is *her* name!" Dirty Shirt retorted impatiently.

The total stranger leaned forward, studying Edith intently:

"Hum-mmm—" he muttered, shaking his head, "it's just as I feared! He's a 'lacertilia-batrachia'—and the batrachian element predominates."

"What in thunder you talkin' about?"

Dirty Shirt snapped out the question with asperity. He resented this stranger's familiarity with Edith.

"What do you mean?" Solemn Johnson questioned, glaring also at the newcomer, whom somehow he felt was insulting Dirty Shirt via Edith, "who th' hell you callin' 'lacer—' er, what you did call her?"

The crowd pressed forward.

"No harm meant!" the total stranger apologized, "it was my mistake; I should have made myself known: I am Professor Arnica Hellbender, of Utah, and racin' horn-toads is my specialty!"

Dirty Shirt caught his breath with surprise. Here, he thought, was unexpected opportunity to get action on Edith's running ambitions:

"Glad to meet you, professor," he began. "In that case—"

"It is possible," Professor Hellbender interrupted, "that I am the most eminent horn-toadologist in the business! What I don't know about horn-toads ain't important. If you have heard of the 'Horn-toad King of Provo Cañon,' that's me!"

"Have you got some runnin' horn-toads?" Dirty Shirt asked, eagerly.

Professor Hellbender laughed.

"My string of racin' horn-toads is without peer."

"You don't happen to have some of them with you?"

"On the contrary," the professor replied genially, "I am always equipped with at least one of the fastest racin' horn-toads I possess! In the present instance, his name is—" he paused for an instant, "'Brigham XVII,' the purest bred runnin' horn-toad ever produced in the glorious State of Utah! Brigham is, at this moment, in the midst of the pleasant metropolis of Red Bluff."

"Where is he? Trot him out!" the crowd shouted.

"Brigham is down at Mother Skillern's hotel," Professor Hellbender explained, "in my surplus suitcase."

"Go get him," Solemn broke in, "we'll run Edith against him!"

"We sure as hell will!" the audience cried.

Evidently, Edith was feeling the tension and writhed restlessly under Dirty Shirt's hand.

"Hold still, Edith," he said, soothingly, "Maybe you can run a race pretty soon!"

"No, my friend," Professor Hellbender protested, "I could not permit it! It would be unkind to allow a horn-toad of Brigham's attainments to humiliate the miserable specimen you so incongruously call Edith! In the first place, Edith, as you call him—"

"Her!" Dirty Shirt corrected.

The professor ignored the amendment.

"Edith, as you call him," he continued, "is merely a lacertilia-batrachia, excessively batrachian. Hence he is almost certain to balk at the start of a race and not run at all. The more batrachian he is the apter a horn-toad is to balk!"

"On the other hand, Brigham XVII, the pride of Utah, is ultra-lacertilian and

therefore is balkless. Naturally he is infinitely superior to the unfortunate creature blinking his eyes idiotically there on the bar!"

"Blinkin' *her* eyes!" Dirty Shirt insisted.

"In addition—" Professor Hellbender, proceeded, "Edith, so-called, has a Roman nose, a sign of degeneracy found only among the scrub variety of horn-toads indigeneous to southwestern Nevada and Red Bluff—"

"Hold on!" Colonel Spilkins exclaimed. "Are you implyin' that southwestern Nevada and Red Bluff horn-toads are scrubs?"

The professor waved his hand contemptuously.

"Your despicable horn-toads," he answered, sneeringly, "can't help being what they are! No one blames them. But as a horn-toad expert of national circulation, I am forced to confess that the whole bunch, including that pitiful thing on the bar, are merely inbred, knock-kneed, knot-headed, scorbutic, scrofulous scrubs! In a pinch they (embracing Edith as he is improperly termed!) won't run at all but will balk!"

Never had Red Bluff been so efficiently insulted. Every pioneer present boiled inwardly with rage. For a moment a speechless fury settled over the Seventh Oasis.

Colonel Spilkins finally unjointed the silence:

"We'll take a chance on Edith balkin'," he said coldly, his gray eyes looking sternly at the other. "After what has been uttered, a horn-toad race is inevitable! Speaking for Red Bluff and the immortal solar plexus of southwestern Nevada, I wish to inform you, sir, that no Utah horn-toad on earth has got us buffaloed to the slightest degree! Produce this alleged 'Brigham XVII' and justify your aspersions!"

The crowd murmured approval.

"As the unquestionable racin' horn-toad authority of the civilized universe," Professor Hellbender started to argue, "I spoke as my conscience and judgment dictated."

"Never mind dictatin' so much," Dirty Shirt interposed; "go get your horn-toad and show us! A race between Edith and Brigham XVII is what we are cravin'!"

"Very well," the professor yielded, "Edith (pardon me for smiling!) and Brigham shall be matched for a race! With your consent, the place shall be here in the Seventh Oasis; the distance, the the length of the bar; the time, to-morrow afternoon at 3 o'clock sharp!"

Professor Hellbender turned and walked silently from the Seventh Oasis. In the street he paused, emitted a chuckle, twisted one eye into a wink and softly exclaimed:

"My kingdom now for a horn-toad. And any old horn-toad 'll do!"

Solemn Johnson plus Dirty Shirt Smith, with Edith, arrived early at the scene of disaster. It was the afternoon of the following day and drier, if possible, than usual.

Red Bluff was in the most stupenduous mood for a horn-toad race in the memory of the metropolis. Already many prominent Red Bluffians were gathered in the Seventh Oasis, eager to witness the impending event.

Colonel Spilkins, official starter; Ed Slocum, stake holder—if Professor Hellbender could be induced to put up stakes to be held—and Chuck Roden, time-keeper, were present and waiting. Three times Dirty Shirt sent Edith over the course in exhibition or warming-up flights. Never before had Edith seemed so nimble, so agile, so vivacious, so anxious to run. The crowd generously applauded the 'try-outs.'

"She's faster, if anything," Dirty Shirt exulted, "than that day she traveled up Solemn's pants leg out at Arsenic Springs!"

Solemn grinned good-naturedly. His attitude toward Edith had changed. Until the arrival of Professor Hellbender, Slocum had viewed Edith with a measure of scorn. But with the total stranger's thinly veiled thrusts at the integrity, the breeding, the swiftness of Red Bluff horn-toads en masse and Edith herself as a special dispensation, Solemn felt his dislike for Edith change into affection and admiration.

She became the representative of the honor of Red Bluff; an epitome, as it were, of the character, the nimbleness, the courage, the high aspirations of the entire horn-toad population of the glistening solar plex-

us of southwestern Nevada. Solemn was ready to bet that Edith could outrun any horntoad, domestic or imported, in existence.

"Every trip in every particular, she is gettin' rapider and rapider!" Dirty Shirt shouted jubilantly, unintentionally plagiarizing M. Coué about fifteen years in advance.

"Be careful, you idiot," Solemn warned, as Dirty Shirt prepared to launch Edith on another trial run, "or you'll get her overtrained and she'll balk!"

"Don't worry," Dirty Shirt answered, "I'm familiar with this horntoad's limitations, and when it comes to runnin' she ain't got none! Edith done that last lap in three seconds and a fourth. I figure she can cut the fourth off in a squeeze, where there's competition!"

"Has anybody seen Professor Hellbender today?" Colonel Spilkins inquired.

"Him and Jeff Warnick were standin' by Jeff's car down in front of the hotel when I came by!" Chuck Roden volunteered.

"He ought to be gettin' here," Colonel Spilkins mused, glancing at his watch; "it's two minutes to 3 P.M. now!"

"Maybe he's got cold feet about that Brigham XVII being such a hell of a runner, and is plannin' to elope," someone said, and laughed.

As if to rebuke the last speaker, Professor Hellbender entered the front door of the Seventh Oasis. A sigh of relief was breathed by the crowd. Dirty Shirt stood at the end of the bar, his hand resting carressingly on Edith's horns.

"Well, professor," he smiled, "you've eventually arrived! Edith is plugin' to go. Where is the celebrated Brigham toad?"

"Truly, Brother Horntoadist," Professor Hellbender replied, genially, "I have arrived. Brigham XVII is also in your midst," and he deposited on the bar a horntoad that appeared to be an exact duplicate of Edith.

The spectators pressed forward, anxious for a closer view of Brigham XVII, the famous Utah "*lacertilia-batrachia*."

A murmur of mild disapproval arose:

"He don't look nothin' extra to me!"

"So that's th' high-power Utah racin' horntoad?"

Perhaps Solemn Johnson most nearly expressed the sentiment of the majority when he fervently, contemptuously, remarked:

"Well, I'll—be—damned!"

"Do you call that bow-legged insect a racin' horntoad?" Dirty Shirt sneered, derisively, "I'll bet two to one Edith can rampse all around him."

"Please," Professor Hellbender protested, "do not urge me to bet! Gambling is a vicious habit. Anyhow, that miserable sample of scrubiness you inconsistently designate Edith is certain to balk."

"Edith balk?" Solemn Johnson shouted, pushing his way forward. "I'll just bet you five to one she don't balk!" Professor Hellbender grinned tantalizingly at Solemn. The impudence of his look was too much.

"Hell!" Solemn cried, "I'll bet ten to one Edith beats that cheap imitation Utah horntoad, even if she does balk!"

"Here's a hundred dollar bill!" the professor retorted, unexpectedly. "You've tempted me beyond endurance! Heaven help you for leadin' me astray this way. I'll just take a hundred dollars worth of that ten to one bluff you're pullin'!"

Solemn was surprised at Prof. Hellbender's ready acquiescence; but Solemn was far from bluffing. A moment later eleven hundred dollars reposed in the hands of Ed Slocum, stake-holder and bartender de luxe of the Seventh Oasis.

"My resources are forty dollars more, gentlemen," Professor Hellbender laughed, looking inquiringly around. "Since I've fallen from grace I reckon I'd as well go to the bottom! On the same ten to one terms, if you insist—"

Colonel Spilkins, Dirty Shirt and others insisted.

Dirty Shirt and Professor Hellbender took positions at the front end of the bar, to judge the finish and recapture their horntoads at the conclusion of the race; at the other end of the speedway, Colonel Spilkins waited to say a word; Solemn Johnson held Edith, restless, nervous for the start; Chuck Roden performed a like service for Brigham XVII.

"One!" Solemn Johnson counted.

"Wait!" Professor Hellbender called, stepping quickly back to the starting point. "They're too close together; they're liable to collide in the get-away! Please move Edith, as you call him."

"Her!" Solemn grunted.

"Please move him this way a couple of inches," the professor requested; "just here where my hand is resting!"

Solemn slid Edith to the spot indicated and pressed her gently but firmly down on the bar. Edith shrugged her shoulders and squirmed.

"Hold still, Edith!" Solemn scolded, bearing a trifle harder on her back, as Professor Hellbender returned to his place at Dirty Shirt's side.

"One!" Solemn counted again.

"Two!" Chuck Roden exclaimed.

"Oh, Magic Instantaneous Invisible Fixer," Prof. Hellbender breathed silently to himself, "If you ever—"

"Scat!" Colonel Spilkins, the official starter, shouted.

Brigham XVII sprang forward. Edith remained on the spot to which Solemn had pressed her; her little feet flew back and forth, but Edith stayed where she was!

A groan went up from the crowd:

"My Gawd, she has balked! Her wheels are spinnin'!" Dirty Shirt moaned.

"Scat, Edith, damn you, hurry and scat!" Solemn pleaded.

Edith tried her best, but she couldn't. She was helpless to 'scat' worth a cent.

Brigham XVII sauntered carelessly onward, pausing occasionally to sniff at traces of beer still on the track over which he was supposed to be racing. Ultimately, he tumbled lazily into Professor Hellbender's hand, winner by the length of the bar of the greatest horntoad classic ever run in the annals of Red Bluff.

Dirty Shirt's fury was boundless.

"Solemn!" he yelled, "Knock that damned Edith into the middle of next week!"

"Don't!" Professor Hellbender interposed, quickly, "Don't condemn Edith! He is—"

"She is!" Dirty Shirt mumbled.

"—simply too strongly batrachian" the professor continued hastily. "You remem-

ber, I warned you he'd balk—Just let him sit still till he unbalks! That will cure him!"

"If you move him he's ruined. In an hour or so he'll repent and never get the habit again! He's too valuable a horntoad to spoil. Just let him sit still!"

"Let her alone, then," Dirty Shirt called to Solemn; "just let her stay right there 'til she petrifies!"

Dirty Shirt turned to Professor Hellbender:

"You're whiter than I thought you was, professor," he said, his voice husky with feeling, "It's blamed square of you to teach me the remedy for balky horntoads! I'd like to shake hands with you."

With one hand Professor Hellbender reached for the wad of bills Ed Slocum, the stake-holder, extended toward him; with the other he grasped the sun-burned fingers of Dirty Shirt Smith. For a while, the professor stood silent, evidently deeply touched by the tribute; a smile spread slowly over his features.

Then he dropped Brigham XVII in his pocket, thrust the bills into his wallet, moved quickly to the front door of the Seventh Oasis, paused, glanced back and said:

"Gentlemen, a balky horntoad's a hell of a thing! Adios!"

For two hours the crowd stood guard over Edith, wishing each moment she would decide to unbalk. Nothing happened.

Personally, Edith resolved that if ever she got the chance she'd do some of the most complete running a horntoad could negotiate. She longed for the gentle slopes of Dead Angel Mountain once more, out near Hellfire Basin, where she had spent the days of her childhood. If she got loose she intended to go there.

"Move her over a notch!" Ed Slocum told Solemn, as he wiped the bar with a towel; "some beer has run under her!"

Solemn started to comply. He grasped Edith firmly by the edges and lifted upward.

Edith refused to lift! She stretched a trifle, it is true, something after the manner of an ex-inner tube, or at most a fragment

of old casing; but Edith wouldn't depart from the bar.

Edith felt that she was being pulled asunder, midway between the shoulder blades and her wishbone. She started to scream.

Solemn let her down, looked at her uncertainly and endeavored once more to respond to Ed's reasonable request. In spite of all, Edith adhered.

"Hell!" Solemn exclaimed. "She's stuck!"

"Stuck!"

An incredulous shout arose from the crowd.

"And we thought she was balkin'," Dirty Shirt cried, reproachfully. "Poor little Edith! Here we've been cussin' her all this time, thinkin' she'd balked!"

Edith tugged at her moorings. Ed stepped to the free lunch tray, secured a cheese knife, scooped it under Edith's stomach and broke the connection between her and the bar.

With a bound, Edith leaped from the bar to Dirty Shirt's neck, coasted down his back, hit the floor with a thud, sped toward the open door of the Seventh Oasis, turned sharply to the left and dashed down Red Bluff's main artery of commerce.

Followed by the crowd, Solemn and Dirty Shirt pursued her.

Mother Skillern stood on the porch of the hotel; she had just stepped out with a bucket of water to scrub off the steps. A puzzled expression troubled her pleasant blue eyes; she gazed wonderingly out across the inflexible desert, in the direction of Hellfire Basin, near Dead Angel Mountain, five day's journey away.

"Did you see—" Dirty Shirt panted,

"did you see a loose horn-toad goin' this way?"

"Maybe that's what it was!" Mother Skillern answered. "Yes, I reckon that was it! Something zipped past here just as I came out—some kind of streak. But I thought probably it was only a thought, it was travelin' so quick."

"That was Edith!" Dirty Shirt whispered. "She's gone! She won't stop now till she gets to Dead Angel Mountain. And I'll bet," he mourned, "that I get that darned indigestion again!"

Solemn Johnson looked up at Mother Skillern.

"Have you seen a tall emaciated person named Professor Arnica Hellbender, in the last hour or two?" he asked. "He's the individual I'm wantin' to find!"

"Professor Arnica Hellbender?" Mother Skillern repeated. "Do you mean that slim, lanky cuss who was peddlin' china and glassware glue? If you do, he's absent!"

"Came rushin' in two hours ago; said they'd been a big explosion in a crockery store in Los Angeles and he'd been notified to bring his Magic Instantaneous Invisible Fixer and mend up all the dishes that were busted. Jeff Warnick took him across to Pimento Siding, in his car, so he could catch the Los Angeles Limited—"

"He—you say—he's gone?"

"He has certainly evaporated!" Mother Skillern retorted, slushing the bucket of water over the porch.

"You'd better move back," she told Solemn and Dirty Shirt. "It's so blamed dry this afternoon this water 'll be dust before I get it swept off of the steps, and it'll blow in your eyes!"

Next Week: THE UNDOING OF HORACE DURANTO

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A Crown for Sale

FROM THE MEMOIRS OF THE QUEEN OF FLORANIA

CHAPTER XIII.

AT THE END OF THE DAY.

HOW shall I describe that day with Peter? I simply can't. It was a day of dreams, a day of sunshine and laughter and hidden tears.

It had a beginning, a middle, and an end. And between the middle and the end came a very bad moment, much longer than the proverbial quarter of an hour.

There are some pictures that stand out in that day in my memory—pictures that I can recapture, like jewels of brilliant hues threaded on a silver string, like a bunch of field flowers, like the murmur of a mountain stream, like a distant view of mountains, rose and pearl in the sunset.

There was Italy—the frontier, a rough

road leading up to the mountains, a road that became a gorge, a river rushing through, swift and gray and dusted with spume, straight from the eternal snows. There was a shrine of Our Lady of the Snows up a deep, dark little valley that in winter never sees the sun. There were vineyards and olive groves and orange and lemon plantations. There was the subtle, unbelievably sweet scent of fields of violets.

There was a hill village, dominated by an ancient ruined castle with four great towers—all the same coloring, castle, village, rocks, a deep slate gray, casting wonderful purple shadows.

There was a walk—the car stabled in a huge, shadowed courtyard belonging to the inn—a walk among high, flower starred meadows, hand in hand, heart in heart.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for April 12.

There was a miserable incident at lunch. Bunch had failed me. For the first, the last, the only time in her life.

She had not noticed that I wore my pearls.

I always wore them, so that I was not aware of them. They had belonged to my mother. My father gave them to me on my birthday the year he died. I had clasped them on that morning without a thought.

King Peter noticed them while we sat waiting for our food. At first his tone was light.

"What pearls for a little dancing girl!" It was just a tender, merry jest. He thought they were artificial. Then his face and voice changed. He evidently knew pearls when he saw them.

"Betty, where did you get them from? They are real—or I'm a Dutchman!"

I didn't know what to say.

"What a fool!" His voice, low and dejected, cut me right to the heart. "What a miserable ass! A girl like you! And I expect to monopolize you! And I have nothing to offer."

"Please," I said, almost choking. "Please, Peter, this is to be a beautiful day!"

"A beautiful day," he repeated. "Oh, yes, a beautiful day!" His voice held a whole world of rebellious passion. "I have to go back to my country, Betty. I am a slave and you are free. You will go to Cairo, or New York, or Paris and will dance with men and they will give you pearls. Don't I know that a dance with you is worth a hundred strings of pearls? It's worth the regalia of Florania. But, unfortunately, the regalia of Florania isn't mine to give away!"

His bitterness brought tears to my eyes, but I dared not shed them.

The meal was served. We ate. We were silent.

At the end Peter looked at me with somber, sullen blue eyes.

"Forgive me, Betty. I have no right." And then he laughed. "We mustn't let it spoil our day. I knew it was the last. I knew you were not for me, Betty girl. I knew it would be much too good."

The misery of his voice went deeper, far

deeper than words. A wave of great joy surged over me—joy that I knew no subsequent pain could ever destroy.

For then my heart was well assured. He loved Betty Fane. He would marry Elizabeth Cleveland because he had to. But he loved Betty Fane too well to wish to harm a hair of her head.

We drove further and further into the mountains, first out of our valley back toward the sea, and into another and through the most wonderful scenery up a defile, where the huge rocks all but met over our heads, and then past little gray towns perched on mountaintops, up a pass and through a tunnel two miles long, and lit by electric light, and out of massive steel gates at the other end into a dazzling fairy world of ice and snow.

King Peter stopped and we got out, and I gazed enchanted at the wonderful view. We were ringed round with high mountains in their winter dress. Coming up from the Riviera, with its oranges and carnations and violets, it was strange and fascinating to find the whole landscape shrouded in deep snow. The road over the pass was kept clear, and the snow piled up high on either side.

Much though I had traveled with my father, we had never crossed this particular pass, and under these conditions I thought it the most beautiful I had ever seen.

Peter and I behaved like children. We snowballed each other; we plunged breathlessly up the snow slopes and slid down them like greased lightning. We were in an enchanted solitude. There seemed to be little traffic over the pass. In the long tunnel we had only met one great wagon of hay drawn by ten mules, going down to the Riviera.

When we were tired of play, we got into the car again and drove on down the rapid, hairpin curves to a village at the foot of the pass, where we had some hot coffee and delicious dark bread and butter, and where the children were indulging in winter sports on home-made sledges and ski.

When we had finished we walked through the village street and bought post cards.

"Not that we can send them to anybody," said the king ruefully. "But we can

keep them as souvenirs of this wonderful day. Isn't it a wonderful day, Betty? Say it is—"

"Wonderful!" I said.

He put one arm through mine, and with the other he made a gesture down the valley.

"Down there are the plains, Betty," he said. "Turin—Milan. Twelve hours take you to my country. Oh, Betty, how easy to leave everything behind us—to get into the car and drive on and on and on! How simple! Just you and I—alone together. Why don't we do it, Betty?"

"Because you are a king," I answered.

"But I am a man, too, Betty. Have you got a father, mother—people—anybody to consult?"

"No one," I said. "I am all alone."

"We could be happy—in a world of our own." His arm tightened on mine. "Why don't we do it, Betty? Why don't we?"

I couldn't speak. I was seeing a vision of what it would be like—heaven. Peter and I all alone, nothing between us, no mountain of money, no boggy of a throne.

He released my arm. His voice fell disconsolately on my ears.

"No good, Betty girl. We aren't going to do it. I may be a fool. I think I am; but I can't ruin your life for you."

My heart glowed. Those words and his bright, burning blue eyes made me think that my task must be nearing its achievement. If he really loved Betty Fane like that, could he be angry with her, even when she turned out to be Elizabeth Cleveland?

I was dying to tell him then, to pull off my wig, to throw myself in his arms.

Something held me back. I couldn't say what. If I had—if only I had—how different everything might have been! How much misery I might have spared myself—and him!

"We must be going back," he said. He looked at his watch, then at the sky. "Goodness, but we've got no time to lose! D'you know it will be dark before long? I shall be late. I must drive like the deuce, Betty girl."

We hurried back, got into the car, and drove back up the pass.

We were through the tunnel and down the precipitous road on the other side before it really grew dark. On the northern side of the mountains the snow seemed to hold the daylight and make it last much longer. The king drove as fast as he could on those tricky roads.

Then we had to stop because suddenly the electric lamps gave out, and Peter said he must light the oil ones that he carried in reserve.

"This is going to keep us back," he muttered angrily. "I don't see how we can do it. I ought to be in Cannes by eight, dressed for dinner—and it's long past six now. I'm dining with my godfather, the King of Maronia. He is rather a peevish old bird, what with his bad health. There'll be a hell of a row!"

"I have an appointment, too," I said, rather absently, I think. Somehow the image of jolly, red-haired, freckled George of Hillenland seemed very far away.

The king laughed.

"But it can't be so important as mine! That's what's so splendid for you, Betty girl. You can't have these troublesome duty visits and all that in your jolly, simple little life."

I laughed, too. It sounded rather hollow. King Peter's voice changed.

"Is your appointment with the man who gave you the pearls?" he asked. "How I loathe that man!"

"He is dead," I said.

"I can't help that. There'll be another. Oh, Betty, forgive me for being a brute! But I'm so miserable—I feel all out of tune. Here, let us light these rotten lamps and then we'll run back to real life and only remember what a lovely day we've had."

It was quite dark by now. The weather was changing. Great clouds were rolling up from the east; a sharp wind was blowing. I shivered a little.

The king struck several matches that went out. I couldn't see what he was doing.

Then, suddenly, he gave a sharp cry—it sounded like one of sheer surprise. And he disappeared.

I sat rooted to the spot for a moment. I was startled out of my wits.

I heard a clatter of stones, and then dead silence.

I almost fell out of the car in my horror. There I stood, paralyzed, listening. There was not a sound. In the darkness I groped my way to the side of the road. I could just make out that we were on an embankment, guarded by stones at intervals, but as they were green and not white, they were hardly visible in the darkness.

King Peter had fallen over backward. That was the sickening truth that burst on me. I was here all alone on the deserted road. And he lay somewhere—how far below? I peered down, but could see nothing. I could hear the swift rushing of the mountain torrent—that was all. He had lost his footing. Perhaps he had fallen a long way—perhaps he was hurt—perhaps he was—

I cannot remember my sensations. I think I must have been half crazed. I know that I ran up and down helplessly for a bit, calling out his name: "Peter! Peter! Peter!"

Then I must have pulled myself together, for I searched round the car, found his box of matches all spilled in the road, and lit one of the oil lamps.

I had only one thought. I suppose the danger to Peter made me cautious, gave me a sort of desperate courage.

I started down the bank. It was terribly steep. Careful though I was, I dislodged stones at every step. I held on by one hand to bushes, very frail sort of tufted herbs which I expected to give way all the time. I have to this day no notion how deep the gorge was, or how long it took me. But at last I reached the side of the stream, which swept along in a narrow channel in the midst of a great bed of stones.

I wandered up and down, calling his name all the time. At last I found him, just a little above me, lying perfectly still, his feet caught in a juniper bush, his head downward, a motionless, terrifying figure. I threw myself by his side, crying bitterly, calling his name. But he didn't answer. I experienced a curious crisis. I felt on the verge of going mad—literally my thoughts whirled in my head without

any control—and then I suddenly found myself quite calm.

From that moment onward my movements were perfectly methodical. I satisfied myself that he was alive. I took off my jacket and a woollen scarf I had brought with me and wrapped him up in them. Then I kissed him, and, taking up the lamp, began to toil up the embankment again.

Fortunately as it turned out we were quite close to a little town. I must state what happened in the words of cold fact. My emotions were so dizzily complicated that I could never do justice to them. I had the assurance to go on that the king was not dead. I had felt his heart beating; I had heard his feeble breath.

I found two men on the road when I clambered up. I was never so thankful for anything in my life as that I spoke Italian fluently. I learned from them everything I wanted to know, directed them to the spot where the king lay, saw them light the other oil lamp from the car and depart on their quest, while I went on to find the hotel in the town they recommended me to.

Less than an hour later I was talking to the doctor in the red velvet, marble and fly-blown gilt *salone* of the hotel—a rather pretentious one, established many years ago, when the place was the most direct means of carriage traffic, before the railway came into being, between the south of France and Turin.

The doctor frankly terrified me. He was a small, sallow man, with beady eyes and a fierce black mustache. He had the fussy manner of a man of great importance in a small place. And he was a thorough autocrat in his way of asking questions. The worst of it was that I could find no answer to them.

"Your husband, *signora*," he began, "is still unconscious."

"The gentleman is not my husband," I replied.

"Ah! Your brother—friend?"

"A friend, yes."

"You are neither of you Italian."

"No, *signore*. I am English. Please tell me how my friend is."

"I cannot, *signorina*, until he recovers consciousness. It was an accident, I understand."

I explained. I explained everything I could. I even hinted that the gentleman was somebody of great importance. I was obliged to. What was I going to do next? I might have to take somebody into my confidence in an hour or two. Who better than this doctor? I cast about wildly in my mind for a plan.

The doctor was called away. A sister of mercy had arrived from a neighboring convent. I was left alone with what seemed an insoluble problem. Here were we—King Peter lying unconscious, when he ought to be dining with his godfather, the King of Maronia; and I at my wits' end with anxiety, when I ought to be entertaining Prince George of Hillenland at the Villa de Oeuillets. No possible way of letting them know. Bunch probably distracted with suspense, although I knew I could trust her to play her part. Two alternatives—a horrid scandal, or an exposure that I would not face. And everything depending upon me!

When the doctor came back I had made up my mind.

He told me he did not think there was any grave danger. It was a serious concussion. Perfect rest and careful treatment were required.

I asked him if I could safely leave the patient in his hands while I went and informed his people. He said of course I could. I asked if I could hire a car. Although I could have driven King Peter's, it was the last thing I wanted to do. He said there was a car for hire in the town, or, if I preferred it, a motor omnibus left early in the morning for Nice. I said I would have the hired car and go at once, and the gentleman's people would be out to-morrow.

"I should like to know the patient's name," he suggested.

"Count Dorando," I told him.

He looked at me very hard. I had a terrible feeling that he must know I wore a wig. A doctor—and that unnatural complexion of mine, and those cunningly applied lines at the corners of my eyes!

"I take it, *signorina*," he said, "that you will not return."

I felt myself flushing crimson at the inference. So obvious—the important gentleman and a little girl of no importance whatever out on a "joy ride" with him. An accident—the absolute necessity of hushing it up. Just the thing that was always happening in books.

"I am going to inform the count's friends of his condition," I said, speaking as quietly as I could. "I can do nothing by remaining here, or returning."

"Exactly, *signorina*," the doctor agreed.

I thought him a perfectly odious little man.

It was about half past eight o'clock when I got away in the hired car. The doctor struck me as being a little nervous. The patient had not yet recovered consciousness, in spite of all his attention. I was racked with fear and anguish. Supposing the king's condition was serious—supposing he were not to live! But what could I do? I must get back to the coast. Already there might be a hue and cry. I alone could save the situation.

The moon was rising over the mountains as we started out, and the beauty of the night mocked me at every turn of that wonderful road.

About midnight I reached my villa. No driver could have got me there more quickly and with greater comfort and skill. In the car I had taken off my wig, rubbed my face clean of the dark powder, and pulled my hat down deep over my eyes. I had always plenty of money with me as a precaution, and paid the driver handsomely.

I let myself in. The butler was in the vestibule. I explained that I had had an accident which delayed me, and asked where Miss Turke was.

Bunch had heard me and came down the stairs. I told her what I had just told the butler. I saw her look of acute relief at finding I had returned as more or less myself. I suppose I looked a pretty wreck. The butler, a very old servant, suggested sending me a little meal to my sitting room.

I told him to. I suppose it was excite-

ment that made me so ravenously hungry. Bunch and I went upstairs. As soon as we were in my room I told her what had happened. And then I asked her helplessly:

"Bunch, what are we going to do?"

And as soon as I had asked the question I collapsed in a dead faint.

CHAPTER XIV.

NEAR THE BREAK.

EVEN in my unconsciousness I think I must have realized that everything depended on me, because Bunch said I came to almost at once. To me it had felt like plunging into a black void and fighting my way out of it again. Bunch would not let me talk until I had eaten something and drunk a little wine.

"It's the dickens of a business, Liz," she said. "Come, let's put our wits together."

We evolved a plan. Everything was clearly thrashed out.

To begin with, I must receive a message about the king's accident. We could arrange that by pretending that it came after the servants had gone to bed, while Bunch and I sat up talking. Soon the household would retire.

Nobody would be any the wiser. We need not be precise about who delivered the message. Betty Fane would not be mentioned by name. But, naturally, King Peter would know that it must be she. As far as I was concerned, it was plain sailing. Fortunately, Prince George of Hillenland had not been able to come to dinner. He had sent word in the afternoon that the yacht was obliged to leave earlier than they had contemplated.

My household imagined that I had been out with friends on a long expedition and that a breakdown had delayed us. They would not for a moment connect my movements with those of the king.

"Now, let me do all the talking," Bunch said about an hour later. "You're tired out, Liz."

She had satisfied herself that the servants had all gone to bed, and, for form's sake,

descended to the vestibule to receive the imaginary message. She was back in my room, and at the telephone. I listened to her fascinating voice; it was quite perfect—calm, just sufficiently concerned.

"Is that you, Laline? Sorry to ring you up so late, but we have just had some bad news. I don't know whether you've heard it yet. King Peter has had an accident. Yes—up in the mountains—at Tenda. He is in the hotel there. A doctor is with him. Oh, yes—and a sister of mercy. You haven't heard? I expect you will. Who brought the message? I don't really know. Yes—it was a young woman. She was very much upset and I didn't keep her. I hardly got a look at her. What? Dancing girl? I really don't know. Oh, well—you know young men will be young men! A joyride occasionally—no great harm."

And then that naughty Bunch winked at me, and, in spite of my distress and anxiety, I could not help smiling.

"No, I don't think it would be at all necessary for you to go," she went on. "Elizabeth will start off to-morrow morning. Oh, of course! She is very much upset, poor child. Oh, well—you know she was brought up awfully sensibly. I am quite sure she will want to be on the spot. Oh, yes, I think so—it's her place. You see, he has no women folk. I shall go with her, of course. Yes, I will ring up and let the King of Maronia know at once. How did the messenger know where to come to? Oh, I suppose everybody knows about the engagement. I think the young woman behaved with great presence of mind."

Another wink from Bunch. She was really in her element. She put down the receiver with a grimace.

"She's crazy to know who brought the message, Liz. Do you know that she hit on Miss Fane right away?"

I told her about Mr. Govan having seen me dancing with the king at the *Jetée Promenade*; and she screwed up her eyes anxiously.

"But, Bunch," I said, "Betty Fane is going to disappear now. She's had a very lucky escape from being found out. She's feeling quite twittery about it. She now fades off the map."

"Thank Heaven!" ejaculated Bunch fervently. "It's too dangerous a game, Liz. If you kept it up, you'd be bound to come a cropper. Now for His Majesty of Maronia."

She rang up the villa at Cannes, where the king was staying. His majesty was in bed, and she gave the message to an equerry—emphasizing the doctor's statement that King Peter's condition was not dangerous. She also said that we should be leaving for Tenda the next morning.

How cleverly she worked it all, dear Bunch! She smiled when I congratulated her.

"I've only left you one bad moment, Liz, when the king asks who brought you the message. But you'll be equal to that, no doubt. And now to bed, child, if you're to be fit for this trip to-morrow."

Very early the next morning—just after dawn, in fact—Captain Greffier, King Peter's equerry, left with a famous Harley Street physician who happened to be staying at Monte Carlo, with all sorts of stores and medical paraphernalia, for the hotel where his royal master was lying.

Bunch and I made a start at seven o'clock. We took some luggage with us, in case it was advisable for us to stay. The trip did not take long in the powerful car. The morning was exquisite, the storm of the previous night having passed over; but I was in no mood to admire the scenery. I was eaten up with anxiety. What if the doctor had made a mistake? What if the king was in danger?

I could scarcely bear the thought. I knew that I had come to the end of play-acting. I felt that I must confess to him as soon as he was able to hear me. I must fall on my knees beside him and cry out:

"Peter, don't be angry! Forgive me! I love you, and you love me—I am Betty Fane! You must forgive me, Peter, because I love you so! I haven't golden hair and a funny brown skin, but I love you just the same!"

As we drew near to the little town, my heart beat to suffocation. The hotel was right in the middle of the main street. There were plane trees around an open

space. Captain Greffier's hired car was drawn up to one side, and King Peter's car beside it. And in front of the hotel entrance stood an enormous limousine. It looked even more powerful than mine, and was all black, with dull oxidized fittings, which made it look very impressive and rather funereal.

It struck a chill to my heart—did that great car. We pulled up behind it and I jumped out and ran up the steps into the hotel.

The proprietor was crossing the hall.

"How is the gentleman?" I asked him sharply.

"He is doing excellently, *signorina*," he answered. He was a little, round faced, good natured man, who ran, or rather hopped about, instead of walking. He was in a desperate hurry and evidently felt that he had the weight of the world on his shoulders. "The gentleman's friends are here, and the doctor is very pleased."

I did not know whether he knew who the king was.

"We are friends, too," I said. "I am the gentleman's betrothed."

At that he gave me an indescribable look. I thought something had frightened him.

"Will you ask the nurse to come to speak to me?" I went on. "I wish to hear all about it."

"Yes, *signorina*, yes," he said; and he looked as if he wanted to run away from me. "But—I think the sister is resting for a little. I—I will tell the other lady."

"The other lady?" I queried. "Who is that?"

And at once I thought of the great black car outside.

"Another lady—a friend, *signorina*."

"How did she come here?"

"The gentleman sent for her, *signorina*."

"Sent for her?"

"Yes, *signorina*—as soon as he was conscious."

"Is her name Mme. Delsarte?"

"Yes, *signorina*, that is the lady's name."

"Where is she now?"

"She is with the gentleman, I think, *signorina*. She at once undertook to help the sister."

I felt as if some one had dealt me a blow

in the face. All this had passed in a moment. Bunch was just at the door. She had stayed to give directions to the chauffeur. I turned round and joined her.

"How is he?" she asked.

"Doing excellently," I answered.

And I walked out of the hotel.

Bunch caught my arm after one look at my face.

"We are not staying here," I said. "We are going back."

I was calm—as calm as Fay Delsarte's own moonlike face.

As soon as he recovered consciousness he had sent for her!

"Liz, what's the matter?" Bunch whispered. "You can't go like this. What will people say?"

"I don't care what they say," I answered. "We are not wanted here. We are going back."

As I walked to my car, I saw inside the great black limousine a bunch of Padre roses in a silver vase. Their wonderful fiery yellowish-rose color, that I had always loved, was hateful to me, mocking the grandeur of the scene, the misery in my heart.

How dared she come up here, this woman, with her compelling white face, with her quiet brow and deep still eyes, flaunting those flamboyant, meretricious roses as if it were a carnival?

I gave the chauffeur directions, and entered the car. Bunch followed me. Even her dear presence was hateful. I was just raw all over.

"For Heaven's sake, what is the matter?" she asked me as we glided off.

"Haven't you guessed?" I flung at her. "Mme. Delsarte is with him. He sent for her as soon as he came to."

It was a week later that King Peter came to the Villa des Oeuillets. His magnificent constitution had thrown off all effects of the accident. By a miracle he had been neither much cut nor bruised. His hands were badly scratched and one of his ankles rather severely strained. He walked with a stick.

I received him with ceremony. I sat alone in the big drawing-room. I had spent

the week in deliberately killing all my tender thoughts. I had reminded myself of his outrageous conduct until it was like a canker in my soul, poisoning my whole life.

He looked ridiculously young. His face had gone thin, and had lost a little of its tan, and his eyes were just like bits of blue fire.

He looked at me, half smiling, apologetic, embarrassed, and yet mischievous. My heart gave a great leap. He was still so irresistible to me when I beheld him in the flesh.

But I had made up my mind. My mind was steel, my heart was dead. Betty Fane had played her cards. She had risked her all—and lost.

"I suppose you are enraged with me," he said, using those actual words in French.

"Sir," I answered in the formal phrase I had rehearsed a hundred times a day, "if you will permit me, I wish to be released from my promise to you."

"I ought to have expected that," he said, sitting down suddenly with his injured leg straight out in front of him. "Do you know, I don't think you and I ever understood each other?"

"I do not think it is necessary now," I answered stiffly. "Your majesty offered the other day to release me."

"I know, and I am quite willing to. But first—will you answer me a few questions?"

"Certainly, sir."

"How did you hear about my accident?"

"A message was brought here, sir."

"By whom?"

"I do not know. I did not see the messenger."

That was true enough. I could not see myself.

"A lady?"

"Miss Turke said a young woman."

"She simply told you where I was and what had happened?"

"Yes. We rang up the Princess de Chanterelle and the King of Maronia."

"And the next morning you very kindly started out to come to me."

"We thought we could be of use—Miss Turke and I."

"And you did not stay."

"No, sir; we did not stay."

"Because you found another lady already there?"

"Exactly, sir."

"Do you know how that lady came to be there?"

"We were told you sent for her, sir."

"And that caused you to go away again without seeing me?"

"Naturally, sir. You would send for the person you wished to have with you."

"I suppose you think I am an unutterable cad."

"Oh, no, sir. You are a king."

He winced palpably. It was a hideous speech to make, but I could not help myself. I was torn with jealousy of Mme. Delsarte. He had sent for her, when he knew I was close at hand. He had sent for her without regard for prudence or decency.

"Now that I know your wishes," he said quietly, "they shall be realized instantly. I will see that the breaking off of our engagement is announced. I will write to my men of business about the return of the loans I have had from you and the cancelling of the marriage settlements."

"Oh, no!" I put in quietly. "Please don't do any such thing. It doesn't matter. I am only too glad—"

I was pulled up sharp by his face.

"I do not understand, milady. It was a business matter."

"Couldn't you forget about it?"

I was all excitement and disturbance. I knew he could never repay what I had already advanced, quite apart from the settlements. I shrewdly imagined that he had raised sums on these same settlements. I knew that he would have to embarrass himself for years to come—perhaps to ruin himself—perhaps to ruin his country—just to pay me back sums that I could never miss.

"I was right in thinking you did not understand me, milady," he retorted. He was every inch a king. "One cannot accept loans, especially from a lady. Such things are purely business. They shall be repaid instantly."

I saw the light of deathless pride in his blue eyes. He chose to treat me as if I

were a money-lender. That was all I had ever meant to him. In his eyes I had never been anything but a millstone round his neck, a stupid rich young woman, who was either tongue-tied or a shrew. And indeed so I had shown myself.

Suddenly I found myself beating an ignominious retreat. I couldn't bear him to ruin himself on my account. I was more abject even than that. I couldn't bear him to cut himself off from me. I tried to picture the world without him. It was blank—a void. Better, a thousand times better, to be miserable and to be near him, to have some kind of a place in his life. If I could only be of use to him with my money, it was something.

Happiness—that idea was at an end. It was a mad idea. His happiness was—Fay Delsarte. Betty Fane, the little dancing girl, had been nothing to him but a toy. He had not really loved her. She had passed pleasant hours for him—that was all. Perhaps Mme. Delsarte did not dance. But it was the beautiful moon-faced, inscrutable woman he had summoned to his side. It was she who lived in the innermost place in his heart.

To cover my agitation I caught at and clung to the idea of business. I made my voice hard.

"Forgive me, sir," I said. "I do not agree. I was wrong. You have shown me my mistake. I have made a bargain. It is cowardly to back out of it. My father would be ashamed of me. If you are agreeable, we will leave things as they are."

"Why that?" he asked sharply.

But I could see relief at the back of his eyes. And I realized what a terrible quandary he would have put himself in if I had persisted in breaking off our engagement.

"I have told you I prefer to stick to my bargain. I was upset just now."

"You want to be a queen after all?"

His voice was mocking. His words were as ugly as mine. I supposed he could not help himself any more than I could. We had to go back to those bitter, half-resentful relations. It was not really our fault. We were exchanging goods. What he gave and what I gave was equal in the

world's eyes—my money, his rank. But neither of us really wanted what the other had to give. So this great misunderstanding had to go on.

"I am satisfied with things as they are."

"You are more than generous," he said in a changed voice. "I will try to be less offensive to you."

"We must demand nothing of each other," I retorted coldly. "That is the only way."

Just then Bunch opened the door. She did not see the king, who had his back to her and was hidden by a tall flower stand.

"Liz, what is Julia Gray's address?" she called out.

"Golfrington Hall, Yorkshire," I answered. "Give her my love, if you're writing, Bunch."

She shut the door again, and I found the king's eyes fixed on me in a supremely puzzled way.

"It's extraordinary," he said, "how, when you speak English, you remind me of some one—and I can't think who."

Poor Elizabeth! She couldn't even interest him except as an unrecognized echo of Betty Fane.

CHAPTER XV.

A SCENE AND AN EXPLANATION.

THE next evening there was a farewell gathering at the De Chanterelles. I had already met the princess in the morning in a shop in Monte Carlo, and she had taken the opportunity of telling me that she was sure Miss Fane, the dancing instructress, had been with King Peter at the time of his accident.

"He is really getting near the limit," she had added. "Going about openly with a common creature like that! And then sending for the Delsarte on the top of it! My dear Elizabeth, I don't envy you."

"Don't you?" I had retorted rather sharply.

And her lovely eyes had flashed a look of venomous hatred into mine before she could control herself.

"I do not think," I added, "that it does any good to discuss these matters."

"I have thought it only friendly to let you know," she had retorted.

I had expressed my thanks somewhat ironically, I am afraid, and we had discussed hats and jumpers.

I little thought that that evening I was to look into her very soul.

It was like this. Bunch and I, owing to a mistake in our clocks, arrived at the De Chanterelles villa quite a quarter of an hour too early for dinner. The servants said the princess had not come down yet, and the prince had had to take to his bed with a bad cold. None of the other guests had arrived. But his majesty was in the garden.

Bunch subsided into a chair with the *New York Herald*.

"Go and talk to the king in the garden, Liz," she said. "I'm sure he'd like you to. You're just a little bit too standoffish, I think. It would never do to let him think you're jealous of the Delsarte woman. I'm sure we're awfully lucky to have got over that awkward business without any fuss or gossip. Do go into the garden, Liz."

I did as she said. I hardly knew why. I should have nothing to say to the king; he could have nothing to say to me. Only stilted small talk.

I must explain the De Chanterelles villa garden. I have already said it was not large, and, to make up for that, it was very much terraced and cut up; and at the bottom of it there were dense hedges of ilex, clipped like we clip box and yew at home, and forming a kind of maze. In the center of these hedges was a pool, surrounded by a bank of gay flowers, and on two sides of it were marble seats.

I walked down, expecting to find the king somewhere at the end of the garden, watching the last rays of daylight fading in the west. I had just passed through an arch in one of the hedges when I heard a voice—the princess's.

"How can I help being jealous? You are driving me mad, Peter!"

There was a hysterical note in her voice. She had no control over herself. I was just going to come back to the house, when the king spoke.

"You must not be foolish, Laline. You know that I have to marry."

I flushed crimson, outraged beyond expression. I tried to move again, but I could not.

"Peter, don't play with me!" the princess cried. "How can you be so cruel? You made me love you—and you flaunt these women in my face. Not only the one you are going to marry—I suppose I understand that—but the others—this dancing girl—and that odious Fay Delsarte."

"Kindly leave Mme. Delsarte's name out of this," said the king sternly. "And please control yourself. I cannot allow you to make such scenes."

"Scenes! Scenes!" Her voice was light and shrill, like the voice of a woman half crazed. "You have no more use for me, so you accuse me of making scenes. You don't love me any more, Peter. But I love you and can't forget you. Day and night I think of you. My life is unbearable. You used to love me. You taught me what love was. I didn't know—married to George, when I was only a child, so that my father and Maury could pay their gambling debts. Peter, you've taught me what love is, and I won't be thrown over like a worn-out glove!"

"Laline!" The king's voice was full of suppressed fury. "You have no right to talk like this. It is grossly unfair. You know perfectly well that I never made love to you—any more than to any other woman. A flirtation with a woman of the world—it is nothing. Ever since, you have tried to fasten yourself on to me. It is impossible of you. It places me in the most awkward position. You know, in your heart, that I never pretended to love you."

I can't remember her reply. She raved in a voice choked and inarticulate with raging misery. She took Heaven to witness that she loved him, that she could not let him go, that she would do anything—everything—if he would only be kind. I was horrified. I knew I ought to go away, but I was rooted to the spot. That he did not love her was evident. His voice rang true. She was placing him in a most awkward position by her exacting passion. He tried to calm her. He implored her to be reasonable, to remember that her guests would arrive in a few moments. She only

went on raving. Some words she flung at him pierced through all my complex emotions with a pang of sheer pity.

"Peter, my life is one great emptiness, I shall kill myself if you are not kind."

"Don't be a fool!" His voice was angry. "I cannot stay here any longer. I will leave you to recover your senses."

I heard his footsteps. I shrank, terrified, against the hedge. He must have gone out the other side; he did not come near me.

"I shall kill myself," wailed the princess after him. "I won't live—any more."

There was dead silence for a moment or two. Then long drawn, bitter hopeless sobs fell on my ears—not loud, but so desperate that I hesitated no more.

I ran forward, round a corner of the thick hedge and then round another. There lay the princess on the ground by the side of the pool; one arm in the water. It was an attitude of such anguished abandonment that I forgot everything, and ran and knelt by her side.

"You must pull yourself together," I said sharply. "People are arriving. You have spoiled your dress. You will have to go and change."

She let me help her up. She looked at me dully, her lovely face discolored by tears, distorted by grief.

"Did you hear?" she asked.

"I couldn't help myself," I answered. "Do please come into the house! Where is there a side door? Let me help you."

"I hate you," she breathed. "You don't know how I hate you."

"Never mind that now."

"You have triumphed over us all. You will be his wife. He can't help it. I count nothing—I adore him, but I count nothing. The dancing girl counts nothing. Fay Delsarte counts nothing. You will be his wife because you are rich. Oh, I hate you—I loathe you from the bottom of my heart!"

She was exhausted. I prevailed on her to come back to the house. I smuggled her into the care of her maid, and announced to the guests that we had been walking in the garden and she had slipped by the side of the pool and spoiled her dress and had to go and change it.

I met King Peter's eyes, steady, contemplating me gravely. For the first time I thought he looked his age. His boyishness had vanished. He looked like a man with vast responsibilities. He looked like a man who had suddenly become aware of things that he had ignored.

And I knew that Laline de Chanterelle could never have been anything to him. And I saw again as in a vision the mysterious, luminous white face of Fay Delsarte.

Of Betty Fane that night I dared not think. In all sincerity I had sentenced her to death.

When I looked at King Peter's face, with its new sternness and purpose, I was convinced that what Elizabeth Cleveland had done as Betty Fane he would never forgive.

I must say I admired Laline de Chanterelle during the rest of that evening. Her maid must have been a magician and she herself a thoroughbred through and through. She came down after an incredibly short delay, fair, exquisite, bejeweled, full of charming apologies. The king sat by her side at dinner, and she sparkled and thrilled, piquant, provocative, a most enchanting piece of Dresden china loveliness.

Once or twice in life it has come to me to know that there is no gayety so gay as that of a broken heart.

My farewell to King Peter was very brief. We were alone together for a few moments in a room behind the drawing room. The bridge tables were breaking up. Some one was strumming on the piano. Glasses were being clinked at the buffet in the dining room across the corridor. This party was to be followed by a general exodus. The king was leaving early in the morning. The De Chanterelles were following him to Florania. Bunch and I were off to Paris to arrange about a portion of my trousseau.

"You made the princess's excuses," the king said to me in a low voice. "May I ask how that came to pass? But perhaps I can guess. You found her coming from the garden. Don't trouble to deny it. I can see in your face that you overheard that unpleasant scene. I am grateful for the influence you must have exerted over her."

I could not find words to answer him.

"Would you tell me the truth—did you overhear us?"

The direct question I had to answer in the affirmative.

"I think I owe you an explanation." His voice was very formal, but his eyes looked into mine with quite a new expression—candid, quietly determined that I should believe what he said. "Whatever I say will sound mean and I am afraid ungenerous. I must trust to your sense of justice. I am not in love with the princess. I wish you to know that. If I had been, I would not have stayed under her roof either in London or here. I would not have offered you such an insult."

I suppose I was slightly off my balance owing to the excitement of the evening. I laughed, as I answered:

"Thank you, I am sure you mean well. I shall not think any more about it. But surely it is not necessary for us to speak of love as it exists between ordinary men and women. You have already told me that you intend to lead your own life. I have acquiesced in the position."

His blue eyes were fixed on me even more gravely—almost pleadingly.

"I was contemptible when I said that. I wish to be to you as good a husband as any ordinary man is to his wife. I—I have committed follies, but I see them now as they are. I have treated you very badly. You have been more than generous in return. You have taught me a lesson. It is true that we must live without love."

"Why do you speak of love?" I interrupted harshly. "It is so superfluous."

"I can't quite explain," he answered, "but I feel to-night that I want you to know. I have only loved one woman in my life. I want there to be no falsehoods between us. We shall not meet again until just before our marriage. It would be as unfair to leave you to think I am heart-whole as to give you the impression that I am Mme. de Chanterelle's lover. The woman I speak of is not in your world, and I shall never see her again. I felt I had to tell you this to-night."

My eyes were brimming with tears. I turned away so that he could not see me.

And before me rose once again the white face, the still eyes, the calm, prophetic brow of Fay Delsarte.

She was the woman he meant. How could it be otherwise? Had he not sent for her to tend and comfort him?

I had been a fool to imagine that he cared for Betty Fane. Perhaps he had parted from Mme. Delsarte. He said he would never see her again. This new strength I found in him, this new maturity—perhaps it meant that he had put her out of his life, that on our marriage he must give himself entirely to his duties, to his country, to his people.

But, as far as I was concerned, it would be all the same.

Fay Delsarte and her memory would dwell in his innermost heart.

We shook hands.

"Good-by," he said. "We shall meet again soon. You have been infinitely generous. I will try to show my gratitude."

Gratitude! What a cold word—when all my being thirsted for his love. His love—that might have been mine as Betty Fane, and that I had had to fling away for fear that in claiming it in the teeth of his pride, I might lose it forever.

CHAPTER XVI.

LORD MAURICE FORGETS HIMSELF.

I DID not see King Peter again until the end of April, when he came to England on a state visit, which lasted only three days. The court was at Windsor, and Bunch and I stayed at the castle.

There was a banquet and theatrical performance the first night. On the second day the king went to London to receive the freedom of the city and lunch at the Guildhall. That night there was a gala performance at the opera. On the third day there was a review of troops at Aldershot, King Peter taking the salute, and afterwards riding at the head of the regiment of which he is Honorary Colonel in Chief, the Ninety-Ninth Hussars.

The fourth day we left the castle, and he and Bunch and I traveled up to Cleveland Hall in a special train. We lunched

in my home, and afterwards motored over to Kalshot to inspect the race horses, and particularly the wonderful filly Bread and Butter, who was entered for three of the classic races of that year and won them all. Peter was crazy about her. I had hardly seen him alone during the visit, but there, on the upland windy heath, watching the string of graceful creatures being paraded, he was quite transformed. Eager boyish delight shone in his eyes. He loved those beautiful animals; he adored them. Not one of their points was lost on him. He gazed speechlessly at Bread and Butter for a long while, and then he exclaimed in a voice throbbing with excitement:

"She is a marvel—a miracle!"

The horses took to him at once. Bread and Butter pushed her nose into his pocket, as he patted her satiny chestnut neck. She was rewarded by her usual little apple, and her friendly whinnies followed us as we walked back to the car. She was, I think, the most perfect tempered horse that ever lived.

"Oh, but this is a life worth living," cried King Peter. And he looked from the beautiful landscape over the workmanlike buildings of the training stables, a little village in themselves, with their dispensary and their artesian well and their clock tower, and Mr. George, the trainer's pretty house and grounds, and he looked back at me almost enviously. My heart sank a little because I knew he was thinking of the power of my money.

It was a wonderful day for me. I had so pined for a sight of him during our busy time in Paris. I had been so miserable because of Laline de Chanterelle's letters from Rosenal, the Capital of Florania, telling me always horrid bits of scandal about him and Mme. Delsarte who was at her beautiful seaside residence only a few miles from the city. I had asked myself over and over again why I was going on with it, whether it was worth while.

Betty Fane had accomplished nothing. No doubt, if he thought of her at all, it was as a little girl who had passed some pleasant hours away. It was the white-faced Fay Delsarte who held him.

But when he came, everything vanished

in the joy of being near him. At court he won all hearts, and I secretly gloated over his success.

And this day at Cleveland Hall and Kalshot he had been just an ideal companion, more natural than I had ever known him.

And I suppose I must have responded to his mood, for when we got back to London just in time to dine in Curzon Street before he had to leave to catch the night service to the Continent, he said to me in a frank, almost brotherly way, and with a flashing smile of comradeship:

"We have certainly one thing in common, haven't we, Elizabeth? I never enjoyed a day more in my life."

Poor foolish me! I couldn't help being abjectly glad that it was I who had given him that day.

A week or two later, Bread and Butter won the Thousand Guineas at Newmarket. Bunch and I were there, and my heart was in my mouth when Mr. George, the trainer, led her into the paddock. To her perfection of form and grace Bread and Butter added the proudest look I've ever seen in any horse in my life. It always seemed to me that she revelled in her own prowess and the consummate ease with which she outdistanced all rivals.

King Peter sent me such a lovely telegram of congratulation. He said he would have given anything to have been there.

Writing to him the next morning, I was just about to say that he ought really to come over specially to see her win the Derby, when I stopped to look up the date of the Derby. And it turned out to be our wedding day. I hadn't realized it before. It was soon to be upon me—that fateful day. I never dared think about it.

I was to arrive in Rosenal on the day before only, according to usage; and it meant that we should be leaving England in less than three weeks' time.

Indeed, indeed, it didn't seem real. It didn't seem possible.

I had been seeing a good deal of Lord Maurice Angell during that time. I didn't exactly know how it came about, but he was always at my elbow. His sister was

still in Florania and would not return before the wedding. Once Baron Leomar came to have a talk with me about various customs and traditions connected with the ceremony, and he mentioned that the princess would be one of the ladies in attendance on me, and that no doubt I would wish to give her one of the principal offices in my household—say, Lady of the Bedchamber, or Mistress of the Robes. Although he did not say so, I took it that there would be no choice in the matter.

My heart sank into my boots at the thought of that new life with all its formality and ceremonial. It would be in a way like being a prisoner, having to do things whether one wanted to or not. And for that I was sacrificing my perfect freedom. Was it worth while? I asked myself that question incessantly. I could not answer myself, because reason had nothing to do with it. I was committed. There was the money. The king and I were inextricably bound together. For me to draw back was impossible, since it would ruin him. And then—ah, but that was the beginning and ending of it! I loved him. I would rather be miserable with him, bound as a prisoner, than be free as air and never see him again. And in spite of the fact that he didn't love me and never would.

I didn't repulse Lord Maurice, though I can hardly say that I encouraged him. But, of course, I never forgot that I was in his power. He was very keen on racing, and followed my stable consistently. But, for some reason or other, he put up his judgment against that of my people, and didn't back my filly for the Thousand Guineas. In consequence he lost a great deal more money than he could afford, having placed all his bets most disastrously, and he was very gloomy when I met him out at dinner on the night of the great victory.

We had some talk together while other people were playing bridge and dancing, and at the time I did not take in what he meant; but afterwards I realized that he had been hinting to me to offer to lend him money to pay his losses.

Of course, it never occurred to me. This kind of approach to my fortune had never been made by my equals. In King Peter's

case it was an acknowledged part of our bargain, and it had all been done through proper intermediaries.

I merely thought it rather bad taste of Lord Maurice to lament morosely:

"Gad, what a worry life is without money! You, lucky person, will never find it out. Living on one's debts is the very devil."

I laughed, not knowing what else to do.

I was blind enough to see no significance in his next remark.

"And how is Miss Fane getting on, may I ask?"

I laughed again.

"Oh, but I thought you were going to forget all about that," I said.

"Naturally, so I have. But between you and me—I'm so interested."

"There's nothing to be interested in," I said curtly.

But I never connected Miss Fane with his lack of money.

Two nights later I was alone in the small ivory drawing room, so called from a suite of ivory furniture that had been given to an ancestor by an Indian prince. We never used it in winter, because it was so cold looking, but on a hot summer evening it was delightful. It was all creamy white, walls, curtains, carpet, cushions; and on this particular night the gardener had filled all its flower bowls with masses of honey-sweet freesia.

It was after eleven o'clock. Prince George of Hillenland and his aunt, the Grand Duchess Tatiana of Sergia, and four other people had dined with me. We had broken up early because our chief guests were only passing through London and had to leave the first thing in the morning.

I was not a bit sleepy, and settled myself down to read for an hour or so. Bunch was out of town for a few days. Fussy and Fancy, my Aberdeen terriers, kept me company, and very quaint their bristly dark little bodies looked on the white carpet.

One of the footmen came in to say that Lord Maurice Angell had called. It was an unconventional hour, but I didn't think much about it. He probably didn't know

that Bunch was away. And he was always in touch with his sister, and I must confess I was stirred by the thought of news about King Peter. His letters to me, though courteous and even jolly, told me so little.

I instructed the footman to show Lord Maurice up.

I thought he looked queer, and very pale, as we shook hands. His voice was louder and more deliberate than usual. He said he couldn't pass the house without coming in. He'd been dining near by and afterward there had been baccarat and he was stony broke, so he had come away.

He had left his hat downstairs, but wore a light overcoat. He was taking it off, and I was just thinking rather absently how very handsome he was with his big, wonderfully proportioned form and his splendid golden-haired head, when he gave a lurch sideways, and Fussy and Fancy, who had been growling intermittently since his arrival, sprang up and flew viciously at his feet.

He rapped out an oath and gave them a violent kick, at which they darted at his feet even more furiously than before. He almost lost his balance, falling against the mantelpiece and clutching at it, and then I realized that he had been drinking.

That was what his pallor meant and his funny deliberate voice.

I was horrified. I had never seen a drunken man at close quarters. When I looked at his eyes, that had a kind of blur over them, I only wanted to get him out of the house.

But I was afraid of calling a servant. I had a feeling that Lord Maurice would make a scene. So I forced myself to pretend that nothing was the matter. I said how sorry I was that he had lost money.

He had recovered himself almost at once, and sat down rather heavily on one of the ivory settees, which creaked ominously.

"Shame for a nice girl like you to be going out of the country," he said, looking at me with what was intended to be a melting glance out of his splendid eyes. "Marrying this king chap. You ought to marry an Englishman—feller like me, don't you know? You ought to stay in the country—one of its assets, don't you know?"

Bless me, if you and I together couldn't paint the town red, eh, what?"

I can't really reproduce his words, but that was something like what he said. I was so disgusted that I could hardly speak.

"Lord Maurice, you forget yourself!" I said coldly.

But he was getting more maudlin every moment. It may have been that the strong scent of the flowers affected him in his fuddled condition.

"Such a shame your going out of the country," he repeated. And then he went on fatuously. "Positive corker is little Miss Fane—absolutely tip top—sort of girl who could do anything with a chap. Wouldn't old Peter be surprised if he knew? Not only jolly little dancing girl but all that money, too!"

He began to chuckle to himself, foolishly slapping his knees with his hands. "Such a priceless joke—feel he ought to be told."

"Lord Maurice," I said sharply, "you have given me your word as a gentleman that you will not tell the king."

"Yes, yes," he answered, smiling stupidly, his eyes watery, his nose and cheeks red now, instead of pale. "But what'll you give me? Eh, little dancing girl? Must be rewarded, you know. You're so rich—lots and lots of stuff to give away! Solid coin of the realm—eh, what? What about a kiss to go on with?"

He got up and came toward me, swaying from side to side. His breathing was heavy. His face was horrible in its lack of sense or reason or control. He put out an arm and caught my shoulder. I flung him off with all my strength. The touch of his hot fingers maddened me. He went crashing on to the ivory settee, which gave way under his weight and precipitated him to the floor. The dogs rushed at him, barking, and I had to call them off. The row attracted the butler, who happened to be passing along the corridor, and he came in, looking alarmed.

I tried to keep calm, but I was shaking from head to foot.

"Lord Maurice has had an accident," I said, then I looked at Davis appealingly, utterly at a loss what to do.

"He isn't sober," I whispered. "He ought not to have been admitted. Oh, I am so glad you came, Davis."

Poor old Davis was more than equal to the occasion. He took charge of the situation, sent me out of the room, summoned others to help him, and, less than ten minutes later, came to report to me.

"Everything is in order, my lady. I have reprimanded Masters for admitting his lordship. His lordship was slightly stunned—the fall, my lady, in his lordship's condition, would account for that. His lordship will probably not remember much in the morning."

I expressed my gratitude and told Davis that Lord Maurice had been dining with Lord Castletrevor down the street.

"Yes, my lady. They say there are very queer goings on at Lord Castletrevor's since her ladyship's death."

Davis was quite perfect. He restored my self-respect by treating the matter as an unpleasant accident entirely owing to the footman's amazing lack of discrimination.

"With these youngsters you get in service these days, my lady, you have to be on the spot yourself every minute of the day and night."

Dear old Davis, I am convinced that he runs his quiet and select private hotel in Jermyn Street now every bit as effectively and smoothly as he ran my establishments in those days.

CHAPTER XVII.

COMMON BLACKMAIL.

I WAS very upset about Lord Maurice, and absolutely stupefied when, three or four days later, Bunch came back from lunching with my great-aunt Caroline, and said to me in her direct way:

"I say, 'Liz, what's this about Maurice Angell? Cissie Greenstreet was at lunch, and you know what a gossip she is—still it's something a bit too strong she's got hold of now. She says Maurice Angell is making people think that there's something between him and you, that he visits you when you're alone at any unconventional hour, and that you're only marrying the king because you

want to be a queen, but that you're really in love with Maurice."

I could only gasp in impotent fury.

"Cissie said Algy Tremayne told her he had it from Maurice himself.

When I could speak coherently, I told her what had happened.

"I don't like it," she remarked, frowning and looking for once anything but comical. "You know, Liz, I never trusted Maurice Angell."

"But, Bunch, what object could he have? And he was drunk, I tell you."

"Well, he's not drunk all the time. Liz, if we hear any more of it, we shall have to take steps. In ordinary life it would be disgusting enough, but as it is—" She moved her head authoritatively—"it's got to stop."

The next morning, when I came in to lunch, I found Bunch looking really worried, a most unusual thing.

"Liz, Baron Leomar rang up," she announced. "He's evidently heard some of this gossip. He asked if you were aware that your name was being connected with Lord Maurice in certain quarters. I said no. He was very guarded, but he strongly advised severe measures being taken to put a stop to these stories. Oh, I believe it's that miserable Betty Fane business! If only you'd never done it and so put yourself in this man's power!"

A light dawned on me.

"Do you think he can want money?" I asked.

"He's certainly not going to get it. That would be fatal."

That same afternoon Lord Maurice called. Bunch asked me to let her see him.

"I think I can pull it off better than you, Liz, dear. I don't know what he's after, but I don't trust him, or his sister, or any Angell who was ever born."

I was really only too glad. I felt a shocking coward. But I was really dazed by this wicked audacity of a young man I had only looked upon as a pleasant acquaintance and to whom I had never done any harm. I must confess that in my own mind I believed his sister had something to do with it. I had felt her undying, bitter, relentless

hatred during that scene in the garden of her villa only a few weeks ago.

Out of Bunch's account of the interview I have made the following picture.

Enter Bunch into the Fragonard room. She had chosen it as being formal and heartless and suitable for a battle of wits. Lord Maurice, handsomer than ever, immaculately dressed, perfectly groomed, is discovered inspecting the famous panel, "A cup of chocolate in the Marquise's garden."

Bunch: (politely distant) "How do you do, Lord Maurice?"

Lord M: (on the effusive side) "How do you do, Miss Turke? Is Lady Cleveland in?"

Bunch: (taking the offensive) "Lady Cleveland asked me to see you, Lord Maurice. We will speak plainly, please. You have been spreading scandalous stories about Lady Cleveland."

Lord M: (in tones of horror) "My dear Miss Turke!"

Bunch: "Don't deny it. It isn't worth while. They have come to our ears. You forced your way into the house the other night when you were not sober. You behaved offensively and had to be carried out."

Lord M: (penitently) "I have come to apologize to Lady Cleveland. It was unpardonable, I know. I have no excuse. But I was worried stiff, Miss Turke—really I was. I dropped a pot of money and Castletrevor had given me too much of his infernal port. I never could stand port in May, you know."

Bunch: (coldly) "That is very unfortunate for you, Lord Maurice. But that is not all. You have been inferring that Lady Cleveland is marrying King Peter for reasons of ambition, but that she is really attached to you. The Floranian ambassador has heard your name coupled with hers in an undesirable way. There can be only one

means by which such stories have circulated. In Lady Cleveland's position they cannot be allowed. You will please take steps to stop all such gossip immediately."

Lord M: (indignantly) "You do me a great injustice. No one thinks more of Lady Cleveland than I do. I may say that I've even done something rather silly because she asked me to. She could tell you herself—"

Bunch: You are referring to the fact that you discovered by accident that she has adopted a certain disguise, Lord Maurice—"

Lord M: (petrified) "What! You know!"

Bunch: (very businesslike) "Of course, I know. Things that a gentleman finds out by accident, Lord Maurice, he immediately forgets."

Lord M: "Well, look here, Miss Turke, you seem to forget that I have to think of King Peter, too. With my sister's position in Florania it would look very queer if this masquerade came out, and it was known that I knew about it."

Bunch: (sarcastically) "I am sure the king's interests are very safe in your hands." (Becoming wily) "Now, why shouldn't the matter be arranged, Lord Maurice?"

Lord M: (eagerly) "I am only too willing to arrange it, Miss Turke. I suppose it does seem a bit low down, but I am absolutely on my uppers. Haven't got a red cent in the world and my diggings are snowed up with bills—"

Bunch: "So it is what I thought—common blackmail, Lord Maurice!"

I can just see the way she looked at him, with her eyebrows a little raised and her nose wrinkled, as if he were some weird insect she had never seen before.

From that moment, she told me, he showed up just as badly as a man could. She absolutely refused to pay him for holding his tongue. She commanded him to stop the gossip about me immediately. She said he quite lost control of himself, threatened to expose me if he were not adequately paid, asked for five thousand pounds and then came down to five hundred. Such an exhibition of mixed fluster and groveling she had never witnessed. It had made her sick. Finally, he had gone, muttering dark threats. But she was certain he hadn't the strength of character to carry them out.

"Oh, Bunch," I said, wildly apprehensive, "wouldn't it be better to give him money? What does it matter?"

"Impossible, Liz," she answered. "You'd have to go on giving him money. And if you gave him a million, if you gave him all you have, he'd still know, he'd still have you in his power. You can't deal with blackmailers. If I'd had a detective listening to that conversation, Maurice Angell would have spent the next few years in jail. Don't worry, child. I've got his measure. He hasn't even got the courage of his evil intentions."

All the same I lived in a fever of fear, as the days slipped by in endless appointments and engagements and the wedding day drew near.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK



LOVE, THE LOCKSMITH

I PRAY you, Locksmith, make me
A key to Sylvia's heart.
Nay, go to Love for *that*, lad,
In such I have no part.

For he's the master locksmith,
Has keys and more to spare—
But 'ware, lest when 'tis opened,
You find another there!

Harry Kemp.



The Family Album

By JOHN D. SWAIN

ON the morning that Mike the Wop was sprung from the pen a cold drizzle drove in from the east. For hours he had breasted it, and now, with twilight settling down, his cheap shoes squelched the thin black mud that had been churned up in the country roads. It was many hours since he had eaten his last breakfast in the prison. The warden, a good and just man, had invited him to his own table, speaking heartening words to him, referring to many of "his boys" who had gone forth from these grim corridors with high courage to make a fresh start, and who had won honor and fortune and had wiped clean the foul slate of their past.

He told him—the warden did—of mistakes that had been made, whereby innocent men had suffered for crimes they never committed; and how, refusing to sink beneath this harshest of all fate's buffets, they had gone out with a smile and with their spirits unsoured.

The chaplain, too, had striven against the sullen bitterness he sensed in the Wop—who was not a wop at all, his parentage being shrouded in mystery.

Old lifers—who are by no means all bad—wistfully eying this boy who was returning to that place in the sun they could nevermore enjoy, whispered rough but sincere advice and warning from lips that did not seem to move.

"Go straight, Mike! There's nothing in it, the other way. Look at us—rotting the years away. Waiting to die, and have our old bodies claimed—or mebbe just forgotten and planted here in the yard. You are young; everything waits for you there outside: a wife, kids; the chance to look every guy in the eyes and not have to tap out your signals on stone walls with a guard ready to jump you if you try to pass the time o' day. Gawd! We wish we had your chance. *Don't come back here!*"

They were old, wise, shrewd—warden, chaplain, long-time men—hard to deceive,

knowing human nature at its dreadful worst and its heroic best. And they all felt that they had failed. Mike the Wop had barely listened to them.

In his eyes there was a dull gleam that was all the more dangerous because it was held in check. Grim, savage purpose abode there. Purpose not to be swayed by the words of experience, nor the fear of reprisal. Purpose that, through the anguish of dragging days and intolerable nights, had counted the full cost, and fashioned itself to an inexorable decree. So it was that Mike, perfunctorily shaking hands at the gate, had buttoned up his coat, turned up his collar, and set his face to the east; for there, thirty miles away, lived the man he sought, the man he had never for a single hour of his three years' stretch forgotten.

The five dollar bill given him was wadded in a little ball in his deepest pocket. He had spent none of it on food at any of the eating places he had passed, because he had been unconscious of hunger. For hatred is both food and drink to those whom it inhabits; it fires the blood and sends winged visions speeding through the brain; it is warmth and recreation; it will, for a time, conquer weakness and disease.

Now, with dusk blotting out the sharp details of the turnpike, the rain ceased, but a wind rose with a biting tang that made of Mike's sodden clothes a livery of torment. He shivered uncontrollably, and suddenly hunger took him by the throat.

It was not the mere craving for food, the mental relish of appetizing viands, but a cruel void in his stomach, a strength gone from his limbs. His feet, no longer lifting from clean impacts with the slimy soil, began to leave a dragging trail like snowshoes, or like some harried beast hauling a trap too light to hold it, yet too firm to be torn away. The fire in Mike's eyes still burned, the spirit was there, but the treacherous flesh was weakening.

For a long, long time his way had lain along a countryside that must have been lovely under the caress of the sun or beneath the full moon, but which, dimly glimpsed through the pall of a rainy twilight, looked bedraggled and discouraged.

Some way back he had slouched through

a little village. There had been a score of houses, a few stores, church, schoolhouse, and—of course—a lockup. Then, scattered farms, and finally untilled fields, patches of second-growth wood, weeds, and the endless road to the east, where ended his quest.

He moved stiffly, mechanically, no longer like a body driven by a guiding mind, but like a senseless organism which plodded on because there was nothing to tell it to stop.

He had nearly passed the little old house when a warm beam of light struck through the wet leaves of a lilac and brought him to a halt. A purposeless, halt, at first—merely the reflex of a home fire upon his retina. He had no thought of stopping, of asking food or shelter. But as if, once having stopped, the exhausted limbs rebelled, he found himself without conscious thought turning in at the gate in the picket fence.

There was no lock; it swung free to his hand, and he passed up a quaintly cobbled walk, caressed by the damp little fingers of flowering shrubs planted on either side. An instant of hesitation, and he stood before the door, saw—without knowing it for what it was—the brightly polished brass knocker, applied his own thin knuckles to the weather-stained panels.

The woman who promptly answered his summons was little and bent, and well past mid age, yet with a sort of eternal youth in her quick motions and her keen blue eyes back of their old fashioned specs.

She did not pause to inquire his errand, nor wait for him to declare it himself; but, as if she had been expecting him, she laid a thin little hand upon his sleeve and, as it were, fairly hauled him inside.

"Land sakes! You're as wet as a drowned rat!" she cried, and forthwith helped him out of his dripping coat, hauled up a great wing chair before the Franklin stove, and set him in it.

"Better take off your shoes," she advised. "I'll set 'em out in the kitchen under the cook stove. And your socks, too. Nothing like wet feet to start pneumonia. I'm a sort of nurse, you see!"

In a trice she had fetched him a cup of steaming tea, and before he realized what

she was doing she was kneeling by his chair, wiping his cold, wet feet with a homely crash towel.

A dull red flooded Mike's white face.

"Here—don't do that!" he muttered, striving to hold his tea with one hand and to repulse her kindly offices with the other.

"You drink that tea while it's hot! Don't you s'pose I've ever waited on a helpless man before now?"

She cackled cheerfully, finished her job, and laid a clean, dry pair of blue home-knit socks beside him.

"When you've drunk your tea, you can change these. They belonged to Henry—my bachelor brother. I'm glad to find some good use for 'em."

After a minute she asked: "Hungry, ain't ye? Men most generally be."

Mike the Wop nodded tersely.

She bustled out into the kitchen, and presently there stole into the little front room the ineffable aroma of ham and eggs frying in a nest of sliced potatoes.

Supper ready, she did not embarrass him by watching him eat. Instead, having set everything in abundance upon the kitchen table, including bread and butter and apple sauce and more hot tea, she returned to the sitting room and picked up the big book which she had been reading when he knocked at her door.

It was not a Bible. Its cover bore the odd title, "What Every Mother Should Know About Her Child." But she didn't read further in it. A tiny frown between her eyes, she laid it aside after carefully marking the place with a slip of paper, and waited for her guest to finish his meal.

The most reticent nature finds itself now and then off guard. Prolonged silence breeds the acute need of an audience. Liquor loosens many tongues; but a warm meal after cold and exposure may act in much the same way. In Mike the Wop, the transition from hunger and dampness, and the evil communion of his own thoughts, to warm shelter and a full stomach, caused a sudden letting down of the bars of caution. It wasn't that he was boastful. He simply didn't care. He wanted to talk. And how could this little old

dame interfere with his plans, even if she wanted to or dared try?

Almost insolently he swaggered back to the beguiling, deep seated wing chair, and stretched animal-like before the fire. He fished his vest pockets and found a packet of cigarettes given him by the warden. Without asking permission, he lighted one, and sighed contentedly.

"Stranger in these parts?" asked his hostess.

"Naw. I been a neighbor o' yours 'most three years. Over to the pen. They sprung me to-day."

The little old lady looked startled for a mere instant.

"You mean—you've been a prisoner and are just free again?"

"You got me," he answered.

The woman swallowed, and her eyes widened a little. Then, "Why, that's splendid!" she exclaimed. "How happy you must be!"

Mike watched her from half closed lids.

"I'm happier than one bird will be when he gets wise that I'm loose," he conceded.

"You mean there's somebody, some enemy who is so cruel that he won't be glad you're let out?"

The Wop flicked the ash from the end of his cigarette into the grate of the little stove.

"Lady, the guy I mean is the one who squealed on me and got me sent up."

"Squealed?"

"Double crossed me. Blew the game. Turned State's evidence to save his own dirty skin. Me and him was in on the job together. And he never done a day's time for it."

"But you were guilty? As guilty as he?"

"Wot of it? Couldn't he take his medicine like a man? 'Stead of which he's been sitting pretty while I rotted up the river. And now it's my turn!"

His listener felt cold under the breath of his hatred.

"What are you going to do?" she asked fearfully.

"Do? Wot am I going to do? I'm going to do him. That's wot! Croak him—bump him off! To-night. That's why I'm hoofing

it through the rain, 'stead of hitting the bright lights back home!"

"But your folks—won't they be looking for you?"

"I got no folks. Pals, o' course. But they can wait. They know me—and what I'll do first thing. The guy I'm out to get don't know I'm out. They sprung me two weeks ahead o' time for good behavior."

Once more, though he did not know it, the Wop was talking with a sagacious and experienced person. Miss Ellen Prime was, in all the ways of the world known to him, as innocent as her tabby cat which dozed on the haircloth sofa. Less than six times in her life had she been fifty miles from this little house where she was born. But her mind, though traveling in a narrow circle, was acute and observant. And since human nature is about the same everywhere, and she had seen it in its crises for more than a half century of time, she had gained a certain wisdom that was in its way vastly superior to the low cunning, the sophistication of slums, with which her guest was endowed.

For many years it had been she who was called upon by the community in its homely tragedies. She was the only nurse for miles around, and she was self-taught, save for what scanty lore the hard worked country doctors could find time to impart. She was present when babies came; and her kind, gentle hands had closed the eyes of scores of dying neighbors. She had fearlessly entered the homes where contagious diseases held sway; and so closely had she woven her personality into the lives and deaths of the countryside that no other ear had so often received, no other lips so faithfully guarded, the heartbroken confessions of the transgressor, of the ignorant girl, or the willful lad.

Now, feminine enough to tremble at the thought of being alone, this desolate, wind-racked night, with a released convict who not only admitted that murder was his purpose, but openly exulted in it, she sought to pit her frailty against his evil stubbornness, and did not shrink from the task of turning him aside.

She rocked silently for a few moments, while Mike the Wop, immensely comfort-

able, a fresh cigarette drooping from his thin lips, let his eyes stray lazily about the prim little room.

To do him justice, he was grateful in his own easygoing way. It had been a good feed; he was getting warm and dry. The old dame was a sport; not for worlds would he rob her or even scare her. All he wanted was a few minutes more before the fire, and then, refreshed in mind and body, he would be on his way. By dawn he ought to arrive. And the errand should not take him long.

He knew the house, the occupants, the lay of the rooms. Knew where to gain entrance—just where the stairs were. And the room—the room where slept the doomed stool-pigeon he sought. His fingers closed contentedly upon the knife they had returned to him with his other things, there at the pen. It was only a jackknife—but it was big enough and sharp enough.

His eyes, sleepily prowling, focused upon the harsh, life-sized features of a man framed on the wall over the haircloth sofa. It reminded him of something—what was it—where— *The Rogues' Gallery*—that was it! Hard looking old bird, with his mouth a straight slit, his eyes close together, the funny side whiskers and the choker and white tie like gamblers used to wear. He looked the sort who, had one asked him for bread, would give a stone; and the stone would be hurled, too!

"Who's the twenty-minute egg?" he asked pleasantly, more to make conversation than from real interest. "The hard lad over yonder?"

He indicated the portrait, which did indeed merit his comment, such being the characteristic of the old time crayon enlargement.

Miss Prime's eyes followed Mike's. A startled look came into them, followed by a quizzical gleam. Mike the Wop had shown her something she had not noticed in all the score of years the portrait of Henry Prime had hung there. He had done more than that. She sighed.

"My boy, you bring up bitter memories. That—that man was a member of my own family. Like you, he nursed hatred in his heart. And so they hung him. Didn't have

electric chairs in them days. And the hangman, he was a new hand, well meaning but clumsy. It took twenty minutes to strangle poor Hen—the poor man. I've got a piece of the rope in a little cabinet in the closet. Would you care to see it?"

Mike passed a forefinger inside his collar band and grimaced.

"Gawd, no! Lady, I don't wanta see it. Your word is good!"

Miss Prime gazed pensively at him for some time, as if trying to make up her mind. Suddenly she reached out to where, on a whatnot shelf, reposed a fat book bound in worn leather heavily embossed with brass. She hitched her chair over beside his.

"Boy," she whispered, "because you're so young, and it grieves me to see you spoil your life for mere revenge which in the end can't harm nobody but yourself, I'm going to tell what it hurts me cruel to do. Look!"

She opened the book upon his knee. It was a photograph album—a book such as may be found in any country house, filled with a chronological display of whiskerage, bangs, curls, pompadours; reproducing the eras of stocks, bustles, flowered waistcoats, melon sleeves; likenesses of the departed, of languidly posed bridal couples, of ugly babies, of others whose very identity has been forgotten, but who are permitted to enjoy in the ancient album a species of immortality. Many of the photographs were of the same perdurable, uncompromising quality as the enlargement Mike had noticed on the wall.

"I'm the last of my tribe, and there's been plenty of shame and sorrow in my life," Miss Prime confided.

Her bony fingers twirled the leaves and paused at the likeness of an idiotic young man whose greased and carefully banged hair left him a bare half inch of forehead, and whose chin, if he had any, had not taken in the picture.

"Here's my poor nephew, who had a grudge against the fellow that stole his best girl away from him. He'd ought to been grateful; she was a regular shrew, as it turned out. But my nephew kept brooding on his wrong, and one night he got into his rival's house and chopped him all to

pieces while he slept. A meat cleaver he used. He run the village market."

The Wop's eyes, now fully opened, studied the sanguinary nephew with horrified interest.

"Did they hang him, too?" he asked.

"No. He was too smart for 'em. He went home and shot himself with an old squirrel gun. Twice, in the chest. Blew him wide open."

There was Uncle Gregory—not mentioned by name, however—whose piratical whiskers and outstanding ears made convincing his tragic tale.

"A farm hand pi'zened a hound dog he set great store by," Miss Prime recited. "Uncle waited two years till he caught him alone, and made him drink the same stuff he give the dog."

"He was the goods, I'll say!" admired the Wop. "What happened to *him*?"

"He run away to sea and was never heard of again."

"Well—I'm betting there was rough times at sea, lady!"

It was a gory, sinister chronology that the old album unfolded. When its curator closed and laid it aside Mike sat staring pop-eyed at the open grate.

"Young man," Miss Prime spoke softly, "I ain't talking religion, but plain sense. Every man whose picter you've seen had a grudge to settle—and every one of 'em settled it. But was they happy? Ask yourself!

The hangman's noose, the life sentence, the suicide, the lonely exile—all coming to a mis'erable end. *It don't pay!* Let alone the grief it brings on innocent folks. Why, I've got the blood of these men in my old arteries! Don't you s'pose I ever wanted to git even with somebody? I've had to struggle ag'inst it all my life. And to crush it down I just set out to do all the good I could while I'm spared. Like to-night, when you come. I didn't ask who you was, or what. You was wet and cold and hungry. That was enough for me!"

Mike the Wop rose, stretched, and looked for his coat.

"You win, lady!" he said. "Is there a depot near here? I'm off to New York."

Miss Prime rose, too, her eyes eager.

"And you'll forget all about what that false friend done to you?"

"I ain't saying I'll forget it exactly; but I'll lay off him. You've showed me it don't pay. The chief and the parson up to the big house told me about the same thing, but they didn't put it across like you did."

She told him where to find the village depot, and that there would be a local along in about an hour. Five minutes later, standing in her open doorway, lamp in hand, she watched him fading into the night, *going west*. His shrill whistling came to her long after he had merged into the gloom—a whistle born of warm, dry clothes, and ham and eggs, and a changed viewpoint.

Then Miss Ellen Prime shut the door, and returned to her cozy little parlor, and, with one hand on the old album, she closed her eyes, her lips moving.

"Oh, Lord," she whispered, "I don't ask to be forgiven for all the whoppers I told to-night; but I do pray that wherever the souls of them good, pious men folks of mine is, they may never know nothing about it! Only grant this, and I'll bear any punishment You see fit to put upon me!"

Then she sat down under the lamp, reopened her book at its marked page, and began to read from "What Every Mother Should Know About Her Child."



THE DINKINS TWINS

THE Dinkins twins were just alike as far as features went,
But really they were diff'rent as the two sides of a cent.
For instance, Jim was quick as light in everything he learned,
While many nights slow, plodding Joe the midnight candle burned.
But though Jim got his learning quick, he shed it like a duck,
While Joe, when he got anything—*it stuck!*

You'd start explaining things to Jim. He'd see them right away.
He'd seem to eat the details up before you'd had your say;
While Joe—well, when you talked to him, you had to write it down,
And even then it was a task to drive it through his crown!
Yes, Jim would get it fast, and then—forget it just as quick,
While Joe—well, when he got it once—*'twould stick!*

Jim's brain was dancing all the time. He'd hatch a brilliant scheme,
And start to work, but halfway through he'd get another dream!
But Joe, in case he had a thought, would mull a month or two;
Then, when he went to work it out, he'd always see it through!
Yes, Jim would start a-whooping, and he'd quit about as quick,
While Joe—when he began a job—*he'd stick!*

Jim always made his money just as easy as could be,
But "easy come and easy go!" He blew his earnings free,
While Joe, who had to dig for his from early morn till night,
Would straightway put it in the bank, and guard it good and tight.
Now, brilliant Jim's employed by Joe, and kicks about his "luck,"
While Joe—well, he's well fixed, because—*he stuck!*

Paul West.



The Handwriting on the Wall

By **DAVID FOX**

Author of "The Man Who Convicted Himself," "The Super-Swing," "The Doom Dealer," etc.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE MIDNIGHT WARNING.

WHEN little Bessie, surfeited with ice cream cones and clutching a regiment of paper dolls, had run homeward Ethel Jepson turned to her partner on the park bench with shining eyes.

"Oh, Mr. Nichols, we've got him! It was Joe Geiger killed old Mr. Monckton! He phoned Charlie Curran from the very house and wrote down on the wall the number Charlie gave him!"

"It looks like it!" Cliff replied. "How much luggage you got at Mrs. Franck's?"

"Only two bags with just plain things like this." Ethel glanced down at her simple little black suit with the cheap fur scarf. "She thinks I'm a stenog out of a job."

"Well, you're going to obey orders this time, young lady!" Cliff Nichols's mouth was set in an unusually firm line. "Don't go back there on any account! The child has told her mother by now and possibly her uncle, if he's at home, as I think he is. They'll see through the plant at once and know she's been trapped, and they won't hesitate at anything to put us both out of the way. I didn't mean to tell you, but

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already one of the boys has been drugged and another one gagged and bound at the point of a gun in broad day, so you can see what might happen to either of us. I will not have you run any further risk!"

"Goodness!" Ethel's eyes danced. "I've missed all that! It—it wasn't Mr. Powell that any of that happened to?"

The question came with a sudden catch in her breath and a note of apprehension that Cliff had never heard in her indomitable young voice before. He glanced at her in swift surprise.

"No, it was Mr. Roper and Mr. Howe. But I must have absolute obedience, Ethel! You've paid for your room in advance?"

"Of course, from Saturday night, when I took it."

"So you were here ahead of me?" He smiled in spite of himself. "Write a little note telling Mrs. Franck you've got a position to leave the city at once, and send it by messenger from the office, with instructions to get your things. Tell him to check them at the Grand Central and we'll send for them later. Then *stay* in the office, do you understand, my dear? When Mr. Powell comes in tell him I want him to escort you home personally every night and call for you in the morning until he hears from me. There mustn't be any mistake about that!"

"I've taken care of myself since I could walk, but of course I'll do as you say," Ethel murmured docilely. "I'd hate to have Mr. Powell think I was afraid, though! You're going to find Joe Geiger all by yourself? Why did you ask Bessie about 'the old woman'?"

"Because of something Al said to Charlie Curran on Sunday night I think she knows a little about Joe and where he is," Cliff explained. "Everybody concerned will be warned now, of course, but I've got to try to reach Brookfield ahead of any message. I haven't a minute to lose! Remember my instructions now, Ethel, and follow them to the letter. I'm going to put you in a taxi and send you straight back to the office."

They found a row of cabs near the park entrance, and handing her into one of them Cliff added a final admonition.

"Don't tell any one but Rex Powell that you've even seen me, and give any excuse you can for your own absence; I'm not afraid that it won't be a good one! I'll mail instructions to each of the boys when I want them to take a hand. Good luck, Ethel, and let me find you at your desk when I come in!"

Ethel laughed and nodded, but when the taxi door was closed and she bowed off down town the light of adventure dawned again in her eyes and crystallized in a look of resolve. She would obey—to a certain point. Mr. Powell could come for her and take her home, but the hours between needn't all be spent at that desk, although she would do her best to manage to be there when Cliff Nichols returned. The case would be over by then, however, and the murderer found.

It was lunch time when she arrived at the office of the Shadows, but the panel between the anteroom and Rex Powell's sanctum was open a trifle as she let herself softly in with her key. The first word she heard was her own name uttered in the chief's resonant tones.

"Ethel? No, I haven't been able to learn anything about her, though under a different name I met Mrs. Gordon, as Cliff suggested. I don't mind telling you, gentlemen, that I'm in great anxiety!"

"I—I'm here!" Ethel announced in a small, very meek voice.

There was a sudden sound of chairs being violently pushed back and then the panel was thrust fully aside and Rex appeared, followed by George Roper and Henry Corliss, their faces alight with eager surprise and relief.

"Where have you been?" the former demanded.

Ethel had not given that a thought in spite of Cliff's reminder, but now she replied glibly:

"I guess everybody's got a family! I'm not boasting about mine, but sometimes I get word from—from what's left of it and I have to—to look them up and—and kind of steer them off! I said I went away on my own business, didn't I?"

"Yes, and you're about as worthy of belief, my dear child, as any other female

Ananias!" George eyed her with grim suspicion. "We don't want to pry into your affairs, if they *are* your affairs, but we feel responsible for you."

"To whom?" Ethel asked coolly. "I'm not under probation, am I? There wasn't anything much for me to do around here, for Mr. Nichols told me on Saturday that you all thought Mr. Monckton killed his father himself. You were doped, weren't you, Mr. Roper, and Mr. Howe was tied up and gagged—"

"How do you know that?" George interrupted, his long countenance reddening. "We never told—I mean, it didn't happen to Phil before Sunday, and you were gone by then! I knew it! You've been up to some mischief!"

"A fat chance we have of making her tell if she don't want to!" Henry Corliss remarked sententiously, but his small eyes twinkled. "She's back, anyway, and evidently none the worse. You haven't an idea when Cliff is going to show up again?"

"No, I haven't!" Ethel for the first time in her life was relieved that she could tell the truth. "Has anything happened that you wouldn't mind telling me?"

"There's one thing, as long as you still appear to take a little interest in the case, Ethel." Rex spoke with a note of grave reproach. "It was Mr. Monckton's own father who was trying to ruin him! That shows how deep the bitterness was and makes the case against him fairly complete. The old gentleman paid detectives to follow him and queer his attempt to enlist any outside capital. Mr. Roper found that out from the chief private detective himself."

"The old wretch!" Ethel exclaimed, indignantly, adding in a quick afterthought: "But Richard Monckton didn't know that! He didn't dream it was his father!"

Her hearers glanced at each other, and George coughed.

"Shall we finish our talk?" He waved toward the council room. "We are all at rather loose ends till Cliff reappears."

"I shouldn't be surprised if you'd hear from him soon," Ethel remarked with elaborate carelessness. "The last time I saw him he said something about writing to you if he was too busy this week to come in."

Henry and George Roper had filed back into Rex Powell's office, but the leader himself lingered and bent over the secretary's desk.

"The last time you saw him?" he echoed in a low voice. "Ethel, when was the last time?"

She smiled quietly; then her face grew grave.

"I have a message for you alone, Mr. Powell. I'm afraid you may not like it and I don't want you to think I'm scared or anything, but I've got to tell you. Mr. Nichols would like it if you could arrange to—to go home with me from the office every night till you hear from him, and call for me in the morning. Just you, he said; none of the others."

"Good Heavens!" he murmured in a shocked undertone. "Is it as bad as that? I might have known you didn't desert us, my dear, but tell me, have you been in any actual danger? I shall never forgive Cliff—"

"No, I haven't, and, anyway, he—he didn't send me!" she interrupted with quick loyalty. "Please, I can't tell you any more, I—I'm obeying orders! He didn't say anything about lunch time, though, and perhaps I'd better go now while you are here?"

"No! I'll finish my talk with the others and take you myself," Rex declared with decision. "You must not leave this office or your home without me, Ethel, till this case is settled. Can it be that we're mistaken after all, and the woman did arrange to have Monckton's town house robbed?"

"The woman?" She caught him up, and her quick mind traveled back to a question which Cliff had asked little Bessie that morning. "Do you mean Mrs. Regnier?"

Rex looked startled, but shook his head with a laugh.

"That remains to be seen, my dear!" he declared. "Remember, no stirring out without me!"

Cliff Nichols had crossed the ferry and at that moment was boarding a trolley car near the Palisades. He recalled vaguely when the child Bessie had mentioned "Brookfield" that it was somewhere in northern New Jersey, and consultation of a road map showed that it lay half an hour's

run back from the Hudson. He didn't even know Al's last name, much less his sister's, but the village was apparently a small one and any shopkeeper would be able to tell him who among the inhabitants took boarders.

He reached it at last—a dead-alive little hamlet with a single, straggling village street in a cluster of small, unpretentious cottages and outlying farms, and he made his way to the post office.

"I'm trying to find a lady somewhere in Brookfield who takes people to board," he explained with an engaging smile to the tired looking postmistress. "They're gentlemen, mostly, who come to her, only a few, and they stay just a short time. She has a brother in New York—"

"I guess you mean Mrs. Dobson," the woman interrupted with a smile. "She's got a little farm out on the road to Springville and folks go there for a rest; men mostly, as you say. Other people around here take summer boarders, but she has them all the year through."

"Dobson!" Cliff thanked his informant mechanically, inquired the road to Springville, and departed in a daze of surprised thought.

The private detective, Wicks, had told George and Phil of Lucy Regnier's past connection with the famous Dobson gang so lately broken up; could Al's sister be the wife of its ringleader, who was now "up the river" on a long term sentence? The name was not such a common one that this could be a mere coincidence, and it would explain many things.

A farmer plowing in a field about a mile out directed him easily to the Dobson farm. It was a lonely, somewhat weather-beaten little house set in spreading meadows with a dark, stagnant looking pond back of it, and a patch of thick, desolate woods across the road. It looked dreary and forbidding and the middle-aged woman who came to the door in answer to his knock did not lighten the impression. She was thin and hard visaged, as coarsely florid as Al himself, and the likeness between them was unmistakable. Cliff came to a quick decision.

"Mrs. Dobson?" He stepped quickly in

without waiting for an invitation and the look he cast over his shoulder was a masterly gesture of furtive apprehension. "I knew your husband—up there. When I got out two months ago he told me to come to you if I wanted to lay low for a while. He spoke of your brother Al, too, but I don't know him. I've been sticking to my own crowd and we're getting out some new paper. But I can't start shoving the queer for a while till the bulls let up trailing me because of past performances. I'm giving it to you straight, for I wouldn't make any trouble for you if you took me in for a few days."

The woman eyed him for a minute with shrewd speculation, and then asked in a voice as harsh as a man's:

"What's your name? I don't know what you're talking about, for I'm a widow, but I take boarders now and then, and I mind my business while they mind theirs."

"That's all right!" Cliff winked broadly. "Of course you've got to know who you're getting in your house. My moniker is Clem Norton and my picture is over in Brooklyn if you want to verify it, worse luck. I didn't sport this mustache and the glasses then, but you'll recognize me all right! That was for a check I was careless in autographing—you see, I'm coming clean! I'm tired and I want a chance to turn around without the dicks at my heels. I'm flush and I'll make it anything you say for a room and three squares."

The old alias had fallen haltingly from his lips, but Mrs. Dobson was sharp enough to recognize the truth in his tone and she vouchsafed him a wintry smile.

"I'll take a chance on you; I've heard of 'Highbrow Clem,' I think, and there's nobody else stopping with me just now. You're travelin' light, but twenty-five a week is all right with me."

Cliff produced a well filled wallet and paid her on the spot for a fortnight in advance, then followed her up the matting covered stairs to a small and not overclean room at the rear. After filling the pitcher on the washstand and placing two thin towels on the rack she left him.

She lied about being a widow, of course. Had she lied also about having no one else

under her roof or was he on a wild-geese chase? Cliff sat down gingerly on the edge of the creaking bed to think. She believed in his identity, and it was plain that no warning could have reached her yet from her brother or Charlie Curran if Joe Geiger was really hiding there, but she would take no risk by admitting it. He would have to watch and bide his time.

The afternoon was unconscionably long, but after a careful survey of the still, gloomy pond bordered by rushes and the sagging roofed barn with one old man pottering about it he opened his door a crack and listened. The house was so quiet that the ticking of the tall clock on the stairs came to him with almost startling distinctness. From below in the kitchen the rattle of stove lids grated metallically on the air, but no other sound reached him. He flung himself down on the bed at last to while away the time with the bundle of newspapers which he had brought.

They gave him one item of information which made his heart sink like lead; Richard Monckton would undoubtedly be under indictment in three days. The accusation was open now, the machinery of the law was in motion and less than seventy hours remained to gather the evidence necessary to block it!

No one came near the farmhouse until supper time. When Cliff descended in response to the strident bell he asked if his landlady had a telephone.

"No use for one," Mrs. Dobson replied as she motioned to one of the two places laid at the kitchen table. "The folks who stop with me don't usually want to be bothered with calls, but you'll find a couple of pay stations down in the village."

"I don't need one myself just now, not for two or three days, and I won't do much strolling around before then," Cliff laughed as he seated himself, hoping that the relief he felt wasn't too obvious. Any warning, then, must come by personal messenger!

The supper was unexpectedly good, and Cliff ate heartily, then smoked a cigarette on the porch in the warm, fragrant darkness before ostensibly turning in. There was still no indication of a hidden presence, but his quick eye had noted that four biscuits re-

mained in a pan in the open oven, the coffeepot was large and filled to the brim and two extra slices of cold meat had been put aside on the platter. They couldn't have been intended for the old hired man, for his supper was already spread on a little side table by the sink and Cliff drew his own conclusions.

Mrs. Dobson was still moving about in the kitchen. He bade her good night as he went up to his room. Once there he removed his shoes, tying their laces together, and then saw to the condition of his pistol before placing it under his pillow.

He blew out the lamp, and lying down pulled the covers up about him, but listened with all his ears for a sound in the house or through the open window. The clock on the stairs ticked the long hours away until midnight and nothing but the muffled padding of heavy, softly slipped feet thrice past his door came to him.

Perhaps this move had not been anticipated, after all, by Bessie's Uncle Charlie or his associates; perhaps the child had forgotten to repeat his question about Al's "old woman," and when Mrs. Dobson's confidence was wholly gained Joe Geiger might show himself on the scene. It seemed probable that no warning would come that night, in any event. Cliff was just on the point of disrobing and retiring in real earnest when a sound reached him from the road that made him spring up suddenly and peer out of his window.

Although it commanded the rear, he would see the reflection of a ray of light from the road. There was none, yet the muffled chugging of a motor was approaching. An automobile, running as silently as possible and without lights!

Cliff had only time to spring back into bed and emit a realistic snore when someone began hastily to move about in a room somewhere near. When the car stopped abruptly before the house and the engine was shut off the same heavy but soft footsteps descended the stairs, after pausing before his door till another snore from him reassured the listener.

Then he rose once more stealthily, flung his shoes around his neck by their laces and clutching his pistol made for the win-

dow. He had noted in the afternoon that the flat roof of a little porch stretched a few feet below. Now he dropped lightly to it from the sill and slipped down its trellised side to the ground. Stooping low he crept around the house.

The car, a low-swung roadster, stood dark and apparently empty before the steps, but a tiny gleam of light came through the shuttered window of a front room which Cliff had never entered. He crouched beneath it.

Nothing reached his ears but the low, indistinguishable murmur of voices, Mrs. Dobson's harsh tones subdued but quickened, and a deeper, masculine one. Then a shadow crossed the shutters and a third voice, whining and shaking but masculine also, joined the other two. Cliff tensed suddenly. If they went upstairs to confront him and found him missing a hue and cry would be raised and he would have to take to the woods across the way or commandeer the car. His chances of ultimate escape in either case were extremely problematical. He waited in an agony of suspense but not for long, for the door opened suddenly and in the glow from the lighted lamp within Al's heavy figure was outlined for an instant with a stocky figure behind him, gesturing excitedly with long arms.

It was obvious that neither intended to waste time then in evening the score with him, for Al jumped into the car, and when the other endeavored to scramble up beside him he thrust him away with a force that made the stocky figure reel.

"Give me a lift, Al, for God's sake!" A choking cry came from the man as he steadied himself. "Just for a few miles till I can hit a trolley line! You wouldn't beat it and leave me with them as close as this!"

"Nothing doing, Joe!" The answer sent a thrill through Cliff's veins. "I'm on the square with you boys and I'd do anything in reason but I ain't getting caught with you on board! You'll be all right if you lay off the snow and this time to-morrow you can be miles away before the word goes out. Don't try any rough stuff. Good luck, and watch your step. I'll come across if you need any more. So long!"

The motor started and the car slid off down the road, while the man left behind with a smothered sound between an oath and a sob went off at a shambling run in the opposite direction. Cliff jerked apart the string of his shoes, slipped his feet into them and followed like a darker moving shadow in the night, while from the farmhouse behind them a sudden cry went up in the Dobson woman's hoarse tones:

"He's gone!"

CHAPTER XXII.

THE CELLAR ON HESTER STREET.

THE pawnshop of Mr. Lazarus on Hester Street was brilliantly lighted on Wednesday night, its cheap jewelry and pathetic household goods displayed to the best advantage but revealing nothing that could by any stretch of the imagination be looked upon as possible stolen goods.

An examination of the smaller compartments of his safe would have told a different story, for they contained a respectable fortune in diamonds and colored stones all curiously enough without their settings. And the packing cases in the cellar were filled with costly ornaments and a heterogeneous collection old silver and gold.

Mr. Lazarus himself, greed struggling with fear on his bearded countenance, sat before his desk in the little back room and thoughtfully contemplated the banknotes laid enticingly before him.

"I couldn't do it!" he asserted at last. "Not for a century, anyhow! I give you boys an even break always. Many a time things I take that it isn't easy to get rid of and I lose often on the deal because you fellows have got to turn them over quick, and I wouldn't disappoint you, but this is something else again, and more risky! Stolen goods is one thing, Charlie my friend, but hiding a wanted guy is another and how do I know you tell me all the truth?"

"Say, look here, Lazarus!" The young man he called "Charlie" leaned persuasively forward in his chair. "I'm giving it to you straight and you never knew me to be yel-

low, did you? I tell you they're after Joe for that Ingram business and the diamonds from the necklace came to you for a quarter of what you'll get for them! You ought to be willing to do Joe a good turn!"

"Always I am doing good turns!" Mr. Lazarus retorted querulously. "To nobody do I owe anything, and how do I know Joe ain't wanted for something besides the necklace business yet? Something happened last week that looks kind of funny to me! I wouldn't say a word about it to nobody, but maybe Joe is in it and for that the bulls want him! It ain't my business, Gott zu dank, but I ain't hidin' no momser in my cellar that's wanted on a charge like that for a hundredt dollar, I'll tell it to the world! At my age if I should go up they might as well give me life!"

"But Joe ain't done anything last week, I'm saying!" Charlie persisted doggedly. "You got him dead wrong now, Lazarus! There ain't even a broadcast out for him, only a bunch of no-account private dicks that Ingram's called in—"

"Private fellers, eh?" the old pawnbroker interrupted slyly. "You sure they ain't calling themselves 'The Shadowers' by no chance? I read about them schlemmils somewheres!"

"Sure they ain't!" Charlie shook his head but a dull flush mounted in his cheeks. "Look here, I'll make it two hundred, but that's the best I can do, honest! Take it or leave it! You ain't got to do anything now but put out the lights and go upstairs to bed. If you don't happen to think of that door leading into the cellar of the closed-up gin-mill next door and out on the alley it ain't to be wondered at, for it hasn't been used in years and you don't know nothing about how it come to be open, get me? I'd take him home to my sister's it's that safe, but the damned flatties are lamp-in' the layout up there and we've got the kid to think of. In the morning when you take down the shutters there'll be nobody in the cellar and not a box so much as moved! It's pretty good pickin's for one night's lodging! Think it over, Lazarus!"

Mr. Lazarus meditated a moment, but the sight of the augmented roll of bills was too much for his caution, and he succumbed,

"All right, I take it!" He shrugged. "Get out now quick before I change my mind yet! The door in the cellar will be open when he comes, but mind Joe don't smoke with all that excelsior around; he's sniffing that coke again and maybe he forgets!"

Charlie promised and took his leave by the side door. Just around the corner in a teeming tenement block a black-eyed, black-haired woman waited for him. When they moved off a figure loitering in the shadow of a doorway crept forth and slunk after them.

Meanwhile Mr. Lazarus turned out his display lights and leaving only one small globe glowing he descended to the cellar, picked his way between barrels and cases with the surety of long habit and unbolted a low door half hidden in the masonry of the wall. Then he mounted hastily to his shop once more, saw to it that the fastenings were in shape at door and windows and ascended the second flight of narrow stairs leading up from the back room to his exceedingly dirty couch in a chamber littered with the overflow of cheap wares from below.

An hour passed and then all at once there came a soft scratching sound in the wall of the cellar which was not made by the rats that infested it. In another moment the little door opened stealthily and the pinpoint of light from an electric torch swept about like a spark.

"Come on, Joe; you're all right now!" a woman's whisper cut the silence. "Don't forget to bolt the door again after I'm gone, and curl up on that roll of old rugs over there. Cut out the snow for one night if you've got any with you and try to get a little rest."

"God, I'm tired," a weary voice croaked. "I ain't got any coke, honest, and I'm off the stuff, anyway! You're sure gonna get me on that freighter to-morrow?"

"Haven't I seen you through so far?" the woman demanded. "Shut up and lay low now and I'll meet you at six back in the alley here. Is that good enough? Don't forget the door!"

It slammed softly as her voice ceased and her footsteps died away in the echoing stillness, but the solitary occupant of the cellar

did indeed proceed to forget it with promptness and dispatch. He fumbled nervously with the edge of the lining of his coat and finally produced a small packet of paper which he examined shakily by the aid of his flashlight. It contained some crystals of fine white powder. Sprinkling them on the back of his hand he inhaled them avidly through his nostrils. Had he not been so deeply engaged he might have been aware of a slight creaking as the door in the wall opened once more and a slim shape slipped through, closing it carefully again and standing with his back against it, scarcely breathing in the darkness. But Joe was oblivious.

With a sigh of satisfaction he dropped back on the roll of rugs and his heavy lids drooped over bloodshot eyes.

Not in many a night had he slept except in fitful moments and for thirty-six hours he had not dared snatch a moment's rest. That sudden alarm of the previous evening, the nightmare of endless miles of travel over a rough road where he constantly lost his way in the darkness and there seemed ever the consciousness of someone just behind; the the ferry at last and then a long stretch of deserted streets in the graying dawn, the getting turned down by one after another of the pals on whom he'd depended and finally meeting Charlie just outside Al's, where he hadn't dared to enter—it was all like a hideous, distorted dream now!

Good old Charlie had persuaded Al to take him in for the day and arranged with old Lazarus, the fence, for this brief shelter. In the morning he'd float downstream, sitting pretty on a freighter bound for New Orleans and he'd never hit this cursed town again!

What was that? It seemed to Joe that something moved—something bigger than a rat and more cautious! He half raised himself and his fingers crooked instinctively about the gun sticking out of the waistband of his trousers. Then they relaxed and he sank back once more.

Nothing was there of course! It wasn't worth while to flash his light, for if anyone had followed it would only give them the drop on him. But it was only his wretched nerves gone to pieces, because in Al's pres-

ence or the woman's he couldn't get at his precious packet of "snow."

He was better now, soothed and able to think shrewdly of the morrow. He'd been clever, mighty clever; there couldn't be any hitch now and once in New Orleans he could open up that money belt that even Al, even the woman, didn't know he had on, and spend, and forget, and learn to sleep again.

By God; there *was* somebody there! This time he sprang up with his gun drawn, lighting like a cat on his toes with his knees slightly bent and head thrust down between his shoulders. Why didn't they come on, damn them! Why did they wait, skulking there in the darkness to drive a guy out of his mind with the suspense of it!

He shook with the temptation to switch on his light, to scream out defiance at the menace waiting there to seize him, but he knew the madness of such an impulse. His ears seemed unusually keen and in the stillness rasped by his own raucous breathing he heard steps, slow, measured and incredibly light, creeping toward him!

Now they were verging off to the right, there was a soft thud as they came in contact with a barrel or crate—they were circling, but coming ever nearer and insensibly he circled with them in an opposite direction, striving to work away from the wall.

By a miracle Joe escaped the litter all about, by a miracle he held on grimly to the remnants of his self-control while his flaming fancy pictured the pursuer he could not see! Minutes, hours seemed to pass while that grotesque dance went on in the pitch darkness, with only the slither of feet and his own hoarse breath to pierce that uncanny silence, and then something snapped in Joe's brain.

With a scream more animal than human he leaped suddenly forward, firing a fusillade from his pistol that seemed to blast the solid masonry about him, his face in the flashes of spitting flame distorted beyond semblance of living mortal by the rage and despair that ravaged his sick soul.

Clifford Nichols, the opponent in that protracted duel of endurance, felt almost a sense of relief when the end came at last, and his own pistol spoke when the first reverberation of Joe's opening fire was

crashed in upon by the second shot. Then a searing agony darted like the thrust of a knife through his side and he fell with a strangling gasp just as the cellar was flooded with light.

He must be dying, of course—delirious or crazy, for there was Joe Geiger over near the opposite wall, but it seemed as if Ethel Jepson, of all people, stood full in the glare, knocking his pistol spinning from his hand and grappling single-handed with the crazed crook and murderer, while a strange woman whom he had never seen was struggling in the grasp of Phil Howe, there by the cellar door!

Then the lights faded and with the shrill call of the first police whistles Cliff Nichols sighed deeply and drifted off into unconsciousness.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"OUT OF THE MOUTHS—"

TWO days later Richard Monckton was arraigned in the homicide court. The defense had demanded a preliminary hearing despite the fact that the evidence collected by the State made the magistrate's decision to hold the defendant for indictment by the grand jury practically a certainty. And—so bare a formality is such a hearing in a murder case—the grand jury may indict immediately even though the magistrate dismiss the charge.

That small, crime scarred courtroom in the dreary old building at 300 Mulberry Street was crowded to the doors. The corridors outside, constantly cleared by perspiring court attendants, were as constantly jammed again by the pressing throngs eager to get a glimpse of the young man whom the State would surely brand a parricide.

The prisoner, by virtue of a dramatic inspiration on the part of the district attorney, was under an ostentatiously heavy guard near his counsel, Grosvenor Hood. He bore himself with a simple dignity that rose serenely above the attempts to belittle and deride it.

Beside Grosvenor Hood at the counsel table was seated a small, almost insignificant looking man whose high, bald head shone

like glass and who moved his pallid, thin lips but seldom, and then to murmur only a word or two. It was noticeable, however, that Hood, himself distinguished in a less sensational branch of the legal fraternity, paid him almost obsequious attention. The representatives of the press at his first coming had stared and then scribbled furiously, for Lemuel Lazenby was the most notable figure in contemporaneous criminal law. Hood had not boasted vainly about obtaining as his associate counsel "the best in America."

The appearance of Lazenby occasioned a buzz, too, beyond that railing separating the principal figures in this spectacle from those who by one means or another had wormed into the room to watch. Here there were attorneys of criminal law of more or less eminence, come to view this feature performance much as actors come to the theater to applaud or ridicule their kind. Perplexity was the predominant state of mind among the legal spectators.

"What can Lazenby hope to accomplish at this hearing?" one sprucely attired old counsellor murmured to his companion during the presentment of the State's case. "It's an open and shut case—not a chance for dismissal. And even if there were, the district attorney would simply step over this magistrate's head and present his evidence to the grand jury. And with *that* evidence they'd have to indict."

"Lazenby's a clever customer," answered his cynical friend. "I think—between ourselves, of course—he's not adverse to a little publicity for himself now, though of course he'll be in the limelight at the trial. That's the only reason I can see for this perfunctory proceeding."

Seated a short distance behind the defendant and his guards were two men who contemplated the proceedings with deeper gravity than the rest of the spectators. One was exceedingly fat and bald, with small eyes that twinkled irrepressibly, and the other was a tall, spare individual whose lugubrious countenance bore a look of almost preternatural solemnity. From motives of discretion concerning their former professions George Roper and Henry Corliss had been voted the only members of the Shadowers

qualified to represent the organization at a public arraignment in the East and they bore their honors with fitting aplomb.

The State had already produced all but one of its witnesses and the tense atmosphere in the court room had crystallized slowly but inevitably into a cloud of animosity and condemnation of the prisoner almost tangible enough to be visible. Even the magistrate felt it and his ruling holding the defendant for the grand jury was so undoubted a foregone conclusion that the reporters began to lose interest in the proceedings as witness succeeded witness on the stand and told with more or less reluctance of the feud between Richard and his father, and the former's desperate need of the money which only that frail, aged life had kept from his possession.

Beginning with the police and detectives who had answered Richard's summons to the town house in the early hours of the previous Friday morning, the prosecution passed to Mrs. Miller, who testified to the prolonged differences between father and son culminating in the quarrel during which the latter was turned out of the house, and to the former's subsequent refusal to permit Richard's name to be uttered in his presence.

The butler, Peter Downes, corroborated her, as did the sworn affidavit of old Jim Ricks from his hospital bed. This attitude of the loyal elderly servants created as profound an impression as the district attorney had counted upon.

They were followed on the stand by various social and financial acquaintances of both the senior and junior Monckton to add details to the account of the breach and the crucial state of Richard Monckton's affairs, together with sidelights on his impetuous, often violent disposition.

The proceedings were constantly interrupted by a storm of objections from the counsel for the defense, but even those made personally by the celebrated associate counsel were seldom sustained. As the wholly circumstantial but damning evidence against their client mounted higher and higher they seemed to sense the futility of further interference.

When the name of Chester Norcross was

called Hood leaped to his feet, however, in an instant protest, but being again silenced he seated himself once more with an almost despairing glance at his associate. The latter was watching the door and a anticipatory smile settled about his lips.

Chester Norcross gave evidence of his early acquaintance with the prisoner before the bar and after reiterated protestations that he bore no personal enmity against him, testified with unconsciously revealed malicious joy of the latter's unprovoked and unwarranted interference in his personal affairs culminating in what he characterized as an attempt to take his life in a moment of murderous rage.

Cross-examination failed to shake him, and it appeared to the spectators that the defense's counsel had become merely perfunctory in their efforts to save him, for their attempt was so obviously half hearted as to become almost farcical. The State rested its case triumphantly, waiting with amused tolerance to see what the defense would try to offer in rebuttal.

During that moment of keenest anticipation two men pushed their way into the room together and unobtrusively seated themselves on a bench that by some strange chance had been vacated by two other spectators but a moment before. The elder of these was distinguished in appearance, with broad rimmed glasses and a small, dark mustache. He was pale, though, and his drawn face twitched occasionally as if he were in pain while he held himself stiffly as though shielding some unseen wound from contact. His companion was pale also, but with a sallowness that to the initiated was unmistakable and his contracted eyes darted nervously about the court room.

None heeded him, however, for the collective gaze of the multitude was fastened upon Lazenby, who had risen and was addressing the court in his turn.

"Your honor, the defense has only two witnesses to offer. We shall make no attempt to refute the testimony of the several witnesses who have appeared on behalf of the people. We shall merely, by your leave, bring forward a fact which has not yet been touched upon. I should like to examine Mr. Clifford Nichols if he is present."

The clerk of the court repeated the name and the pale, distinguished looking individual who had entered with his oddly dissimilar companion rose and approached the witness stand. When he had been sworn in Lemuel Lazenby asked:

"Your profession, Mr. Nichols?"

"I am a private detective," Cliff responded in a weak but steady tone, "a member of the firm incorporated under the name of the Shadowers."

"Who enlisted your services in connection with this case?"

"Mr. Grosvenor Hood, of the counsel for the defense."

"When?"

"Last Friday morning."

"Did you view the scene of the crime?"

"I did, sir. I examined minutely the room in which Mr. de Puyster Monckton had been found dead."

"Will you describe in detail to the court the discoveries, if any, which you made there?"

"On the wall beside the telephone was written a series of four figures, 6-0-9-0." Cliff's quiet, well bred voice reached to the corners of the room and George and Henry turned and stared long and questioningly at each other. What was Cliff putting over? Hadn't that number been 6099?

"You are positive of this?" The attorney was evidently asking for a repetition to impress the fact upon the minds of the jury and Cliff complied.

"I am certain. The figures were 6-0-9-0. They had been written with a soft lead pencil, in an irregular downward slant, with open loops and a wavering tail on the '9.' They were unevenly spaced also, the figures at both ends separated widely from the two center ones which all but overlapped, and the pencil had been pressed so deeply into the wall paper that it had left indentations, with a sharp gouge at the loop of the final '0' where the lead had broken short off, leaving a superfluous downstroke and scattered dots. I discovered also the fragment of lead broken from the pencil; it was lying on the white linen floor covering just below the telephone instrument."

Lazenby submitted in evidence the scrap of lead and a paper tracing together with

the impression from it. Although the prosecution interposed an objection it was overruled.

"Do you recognize this tracing?" The attorney passed it forward and Cliff glanced at it and nodded.

"Yes. I made it myself, from the figures written on the wall."

"What is your special line of work in connection with the Shadowers?"

"I am the handwriting expert of the corporation," Cliff replied with dignity.

"It was in this capacity that you assumed entire charge of this investigation into the death of Mr. Monckton?"

"Yes. It was clearly a handwriting case. By no other means could the murderer of Mr. Monckton have been traced."

This time the district attorney's roar of objection was sustained, but the calm assertion had made an ineradicable impression on court and spectators alike.

"As a handwriting expert, then, would you say that these wavering, uneven figures had been written by an aged person?"

"No. I would say they had been written gropingly by one who could not see. I would say they had been written in the dark."

Again came an objection and again it was sustained, but Lazenby went on:

"Did you make any further discoveries?"

"Not until my second visit to the estate where the crime took place. There on a spike of the high iron fence near a footpath I found a torn fragment of worn blue serge."

The scrap of cloth was admitted in evidence and identified, and then Clifford was turned over to the district attorney, who submitted him to a grueling cross-examination, but could not shake his testimony.

As he stepped down from the stand at last the clerk of the court called:

"Bessie Farley."

A little figure which seemed incredibly small in a simple white frock rose from far back among the spectators and tripped forward, round eyed and blushing shyly, but undismayed, while a stir ran around the court room and the prisoner himself stared in unconcealed amazement.

"This baby cannot know the meaning

and nature of an oath!" The district attorney was on his feet in a moment to guard against an unexpected attack from this wholly undreamed-of quarter, but Bessie herself replied to him.

Her polite little piping voice brought instant, electrified silence in the crowded room.

"Oh, excuth me, thir, but I do! My mamma told me; it meanth promithing to God to tell the truth."

"The little lady seems thoroughly conversant—" Lazenby began, but the prosecutor broke in upon him.

"I object on the grounds of this child's age! Her statements cannot be accepted as evidence! The learned counsel for the defense must indeed be at his wit's end to go to the nursery for a forlorn hope!"

The wrangle was interrupted by the magistrate, who announced curtly:

"Objection overruled. Let the oath be administered to the witness."

Bessie's little hand was promptly uplifted and her childish treble repeated the covenant unfalteringly, with a sweet seriousness that increased the impression she had made. Then Lazenby took charge.

"Bessie, where do you live?"

"At 840 West One Hundred and Tenth Street." The lisp had fallen from her now that they were going to let her tell her story and help Joe in whatever was troubling him. She didn't know what it was except that somehow it was connected with the sad faced young man they called the defendant at the bar. Bessie smiled with happy confidence into the austere face of Lazenby.

"Who else lives there?" His tone had become almost benignly paternal.

"In our flat? My mamma and my Uncle Charlie."

"Have you a telephone?"

"Oh, yes! It was only put in a little while ago!" Her replies came readily, with unstudied promptitude.

"Can you remember the number, Bessie?" There was an added weightiness in the attorney's voice with the question, but the child's naïve unconcern brought the portent of her response home to her hearers all the more poignantly.

"Of course. It's Parkside 6-0-9-0."

A murmur of astonishment and expectancy rose and swelled, but the magistrate's gavel descended sharply and quiet was restored. Richard Monckton's eyes shone with swiftly reawakened hope, Henry Corliss and George Roper were stunned and the prosecutor visibly taken aback, but the witness was wholly unconscious of any special significance in her reply and gazed in docile inquiry at the nice, gentle old man who was questioning her.

"You're sure of the number 6-0-9-0?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. You can see it there now if you go to our house, and besides, I answer it lots of times for Uncle Charlie and his friends."

"Did you answer the telephone at your home last Thursday evening, Bessie?"

"No, sir. It didn't ring." She wiggled a trifle forward in her chair. "I didn't have any lessons to do for next day 'cause I was mumping, but mamma read to me after supper; Uncle Charlie had gone to Al's. That's how I remember; it was the last nice time we've had!"

"What time did your Uncle Charlie come home? Do you remember?"

Bessie nodded energetically.

"Yes, 'cause Uncle Charlie asked if Joe had called him up and said it was eleven; that Joe had called him at Al's and he'd given Joe our new number to telephone in an hour. He was awful worried and waited up after mamma sent me to bed."

"It was eleven o'clock on Thursday night when your uncle came home and Joe had called him up at Al's more than an hour before; your uncle had at that time given Joe the new telephone number, 6-0-9-0?" Lazenby reiterated impressively. "Why was your uncle worried when he returned and learned Joe had not called him?"

The district attorney sprang up with an anxious protest thinly veiled in sarcasm as to the relevancy of the testimony, but the judge overruled him and the question was repeated.

"Uncle Charlie said he was sorry he'd given our number to Joe just then; that Joe took a risk in calling from where he did." Bessie spoke slowly, wrinkling her small brow in the effort to remember.

"And where was Joe, Bessie, when he called your uncle up at Al's? Do you know?" Lazenby leaned toward her.

"No, thir." The child shook her head and the neatly braided loops of brown hair flapped about her ears. "I gueth he wath vithiting in thombody'th houth where there wath a baby, cauth Uncle Charlie thaid thomthing about a 'crib.'"

This time the murmur became an uproar and it was with difficulty that the magistrate quelled it. The associate counsel for the defense gave Bessie a moment in which to recover from the embarrassment that had tripped her tongue to lisping again, and then inquired gently.

"Did Joe call you up on the telephone the next day—last Friday?"

"No, sir. Uncle Charlie went out early and bought a paper and when he came in he looked terrible white and sick. My mamma cried out, and then they went into the kitchen and shut the door and talked ever so long. I was playing with my doll that Joe gave me when they came out, and Uncle Charlie said if anybody called up and I answered the telephone I wasn't to talk to them if I didn't know who they were, and I wasn't to say a word about Joe to anybody, ever! I wasn't to let anybody know I had heard his name.

"Uncle Charlie said that the Bad Man would come and get me if I did! He looked awful scared and my mamma, too, and—she cries a lot!" The piping voice trembled and Bessie's sensitive lips quivered a little. "My Uncle Charlie don't play with me any more, either, and I was glad when the lady that talked to me in the park said I was to come and help Joe."

The lady! This time George and Henry ventured a second questioning, suspicious glance at each other. It could not have been a female operative of the police, for the authorities had known no more than they of this sudden turn of events—but Ethel? Had their enterprising secretary added kidnaping to the list of her enormities in the interests of the Shadowers?

But Lazenby was going on in his smooth, fatherly tones.

"Who is 'Joe,' Bessie?"

"He's a friend of ours—Joe Geiger,

He's awful nice!" Her round eyes suddenly shone. "He gave me a lovely doll, and once when he was showing us some jewelry—rings and things—he wanted to give me a bracelet with pretty blue stones in it, but mamma wouldn't let him; she said a—a curse would go with it, but Joe and Uncle Charlie just laughed."

"Have you seen Joe since last Thursday night?"

Bessie shook her head again, dolefully this time.

"No, and Uncle Charlie says we won't; that Joe's going away—!" Then her eyes suddenly lighted and her small finger pointed straight at the sallow stranger who had entered with Cliff Nichols, and who now sat cowering in his chair. "Why there he is now!—*Hello, Joe!*"

In the silence that followed this greeting the man leaped wildly to his feet.

"I done it! I killed the old man, but Gawd knows I didn't mean to!"

When the prisoner had been released, the self-confessed murderer of De Puyster Monckton led away, and a semblance of quiet restored to the hysterical throng, one of the guards who had attended Richard Monckton turned to the other.

"I never saw the beat of that in the homicide court!" he exclaimed behind his hand. "The child not even knowing she was sending a man to his death!—For what do they allow kids in court? The Gerry Society should have put a stop to it!"

"Twas not the child done it, Jawn. 'Twas fate workin' ag'in him!" The second guard shook his head. "He'll get the chair and serve him right! Ain't there a sayin' that out of the mouths of babes and suckers comes the word that'll put you wise?"

CHAPTER XXIV.

ETHEL'S REWARD.

A FORTNIGHT later the six Shadowers were holding a meeting in the central council chamber presided over by Rex Powell, gravely regarding three objects which were assembled on the table

before them. The first was a series of large, typewritten sheets of paper fastened together with a clip, the second a certified check and the third a square flat jeweler's box of sizable dimensions.

"What do you suppose has been the matter with Ethel?" Henry Corliss asked anxiously. "Never knew her to be sick a day since she first came to us, and she hasn't shown up since the case ended. You're sure she is actually home, Rex? Mrs. Gordon isn't stalling for her? She told you Ethel was really ill, but that it wasn't serious? Why the devil wouldn't she say what it was, then?"

"I don't know," Rex Powell replied. "I'm convinced she is telling the truth when she says that Ethel is at home, but she may have some reason of her own for denying herself to us all this time. However, Mrs. Gordon assured me over the phone this morning that my secretary would be able to resume her duties today."

"I've prided myself on my ability to read character!" George shook his head. "It's stood me in good stead in every con game I've worked for nearly forty years, but I'm ready to put Ethel down as one of my permanent failures. To tell you the truth, I thought she had been unduly smitten with the charms of our client, and I wonder how she'll take the news of his renewed engagement to Barbara Norcross, that was published yesterday in all the papers? Still, there is the young man of the daily flowers and the donor of the Pekingese. We must still take him into consideration."

"That's tommyrot about Monckton—Ethel stuck up for him because she believed in him, and that's where she showed common sense." Phil Howe tilted his chair back and thrust both hands into his pockets. "She and Cliff were the only wise ones in the bunch, and it's lucky for young Monckton that we gave Cliff the case to handle! Lucky for the reputation of the Shadowers, too, but the rest of us were prize boobs! Why, even when I found out that Lucy was in with the gang I couldn't convince myself that there'd really been a thief there in the Monckton house and that she'd tipped him off to the lay!"

"But you saved the day in the end,

Phil!" Cliff Nichols exclaimed. "I suppose I ought to have taken you all into my confidence but I couldn't change your opinion and I meant to work it out alone. I know we agreed to wait till Ethel came back for our final reports on the case, but it's all wound up now that Monckton's check has come and I want to know how you got on the Regnier woman's trail again and why it led to that cellar just when Joe Geiger had opened fire on me."

"I found an old friend who'd worked in with the Dobson gang and he told me where she was staying since Sunday when she and the roughstuff guy got rid of me so neatly—she was with the mother of one of the boys who's doing time now," Phil explained.

"I watched from Monday, when I was tipped off, till Wednesday morning when Joe Geiger came to her. She must have turned him down, but she didn't dare give him the go-by entirely, for when that Charlie Curran showed up at her joint that night she went with him down to the old fence, Lazarus, on Hester Street. I did business with him myself in the old days and I knew about that cellar, but of course I wasn't wise that it was Joe who'd croaked the old man and they wanted to hide him there that night.

"Charlie must have got cold feet, for it was her who went to Al's speakeasy, got Joe and took him back down there. She came out alone and waited in the alley and me with her, although she wasn't wise to that. After a bit she beat it into the cellar of the empty saloon next door to Lazarus' and listened. With the first shot she was through that connecting door and me after her! I switched on the lights and grabbed her when she tried to hold me back from reaching Joe, and then all at once Ethel was there, knocking the gun from his hand but Cliff was down!

"When I saw that I forgot all about the she-devil and sailed into Joe, but the fight was all gone out of him and he was blubbing like a kid. The police whistles were blowing like hell outside and I knew Cliff would be taken care of; we didn't want our game gummed up at the very last, for I'd twigged what was up and that the bulls

would get all the credit, so I made Ethel help me hustle Joe up that alley and through another that I was wise to, till I could get him to Pink-Eye Mike's where we kept him till the morning of the homicide hearing.

"Ethel rushed off to the hospital where they'd taken you, Cliff, and as soon as she'd found out you only had a nicked rib from Joe's shot she came and told me, and then beat it away somewhere. That's all I had to do with it."

"It was more than any of the rest did to help Cliff!" Lucian Baynes remarked. "I feel like a crass idiot!—Cliff, tell us now what put you on the right track about the real phone number written there on the wall."

"Ethel did that!" Cliff smiled. "That was why I took her into partnership with me, but I might have known I couldn't handle her!"

He told them in detail all that had occurred since Ethel's discovery, to the midnight hour when he had followed the murderer from the lonely Dobson farm by way of trolley and ferry to one after another of his old friends and accomplices until he found a temporary shelter at Al's illicit saloon.

"Then you appeared on the scene, Phil, trailing Lucy when she came Wednesday evening to take Joe down to Lazarus' cellar," Cliff added with a laugh. "You trailed them and I brought up the rear, but when you two halted in the alley after she had reappeared I slipped past you and went into the cellar after Joe. The rest you know, but I made one bonehead play and I'm going to confess it. Do you remember, Phil, when we first examined the Monckton house I asked you to jimmy the desk in the room where the murder took place and bring me whatever papers you found there that contained anything except ordinary accounts?"

Phil Howe nodded.

"I did. I brought you some that just had figures and dates written on them, and the initials 'R. W.' and an 'R' by itself here and there. You never said anything about them after I gave them to you."

"Because I forgot them completely! I never even examined them until George

learned from that private detective that the old man had hired him to follow Richard and queer his financial game. Then I found those papers were a record of Radway Wicks' reports and expense account, together with the various sums De Puyster Monckton had spent in his different attempts to break his son. Richard had to be told, of course, after he was set free and his father's own lawyer Raymond Sanders supplied the motive.

"The old man was determined to ruin Richard in Wall Street in the hope that it would break his pride and Richard would come to him for a reconciliation, willing at last to carry on the banking institution which his ancestors had founded. It hadn't anything to do with the crime, but it complicated the investigation rather seriously for us. Did Wicks explain to you why he went to the Manor late that Saturday night?"

Cliff turned to George, who nodded.

"He trusts to our appreciation of the ethics of our calling not to give him away, but he went to get possession, if he could, of the very memoranda which Phil had found and given to you. He'd been paid good money, but he'd lent himself to a pretty rotten game of the old man's even if it was from a clean motive, and it would put him and his agency in a shady light and injure his business."

George paused and added: "It all seems clear enough now, especially with Joe's confession. Cliff had doped out how the murder occurred accurately, hadn't he?"

"Yes." Rex took up the typed sheets from the table. "Here's the verbatim report on it. Let me see—Joe tells about the Regnier woman being ready to quit and line up another crib to crack, but they thought they'd make a clean sweep of that one by grabbing whatever valuables were left unguarded in the town house. Joe found it a cinch—he was working alone on Lucy's tip—and when he'd finished searching old Mr. Monckton's room he noticed the phone on the wall and couldn't resist calling up Charlie, who was waiting for him at Al's.

"Here's what he says himself: 'I thought it would be a hell of a joke and when I got

him on the wire I told him there'd been nothing to it and I was all packed up ready to get the stuff downtown. I said I'd meet him later at Al's but he said "no," to call him up at his own joint and he gave me the number. It was all dark and I hadn't another hand to flash the light, but I wrote the number down on the wall, like the dick says—6-0-9-0. I hooked up the receiver with the other hand just as I finished and then I heard something behind me and the electric lights burst out!

"Me pencil broke in me hand, but I didn't know it then! I whirled around and there stood the old guy, right between me and the door! I dunno what hit me then, but I'd been sniffing the snow to nerve me up to the job, and after all me bragging there I was pinched! I grabbed the billy out of me pocket and let him have it over head, but when he dropped I kind of come to. Then I seen I'd croaked him for fair and I beat it in a hurry, tearing me pants leg on the fence. I didn't know that, though, till I got to Al's. He sent me out to his sister's dump in the sticks and it was there the dick found me. I never meant to croak the old guy, only put him to sleep. Before God, I never meant it and I see him in front of me all the time! I ain't had a minute's rest and all the snow in the world don't drive the sight of him away! I'm glad it's over!"

There was silence for a moment after Rex had finished reading and then Lucian Baynes asked:

"How did you ever induce him to go to court with you when Monckton was arraigned?"

"I didn't have to use much persuasion," Cliff replied. "I saw to it that Pink-Eye Mike kept him charged up with all the dope he wanted, made him believe we were pals of Al, taking care of him, and that he hadn't a chance in the world of ever being found out. He had never seen me and I reminded him it was night when he ran away from the farm, so the amateur detective who had gone there to smoke him out wouldn't know him if he came face to face with him. He had the guilty man's usual craving to see the suspect who was going to suffer in his place, the 'snow' had given him an ab-

normal sense of security and when I suggested that it would be a good joke to go to the hearing he couldn't resist the temptation."

"But how did you know the kid was going to be there? Somebody must have planned that coup on the part of the defense and you were all prepared to go on the stand." Henry spoke in an aggrieved tone. "George and I sat there gasping like fish out of water!"

"Grosvenor Hood and Lemuel Lazenby called on me at the hospital a few hours after Ethel had inquired about my condition, and told me the line they meant to take and that little Bessie would be produced in court to tell her story, corroborating my testimony on the stand. I knew, of course, that Ethel was at the bottom of it then, but I was worried about Joe till I got out of the hospital and Phil told me he had him safe and sound. It's a good thing the police caught the Regnier woman just as she was preparing to leave the country. She'll go up as Joe's accomplice, or accessory before the fact even if they can't fasten anything else on her. But they'll never get her to confess; she isn't that kind. Now, if Ethel—?"

He got no further, for at that moment a key was inserted in the office door and Ethel herself walked in. She was pale and there was a rather sheepish air about her, but at the chorus of greeting she came slowly through the panelled opening into the council room and stood before them.

"I couldn't come before," she protested in answer to the volley of reproachful questioning. "I was sick, really, but I'm all right now."

"Ethel!" Rex Powell exclaimed. "You weren't hurt in the fight in that cellar, were you? Did a stray shot—"

"Goodness, no!" She smiled. "I wouldn't let you have the laugh on me, though, by telling you what I'd got out of this last case! I suppose I'd better tell, though, just what I did do, and get it over. You've heard from Mr. Nichols where I'd been when you thought I'd gone to see my family?"

"We never thought that for a minute, Ethel, but we wouldn't contradict a lady."

Rex smiled too, but there was a gentle rebuke in his tone. "Sit down and assure Cliff for me that I tried to obey his instructions."

"About bringing me to the office here in the mornings and seeing me home?" Ethel seated herself. "We both obeyed him, for you couldn't help it if I wasn't here to be taken home, and Mr. Nichols hadn't told me I couldn't go out alone during office hours if I liked! He only said for me to be sure he found me here at my desk when he came back, and I would have been if I hadn't got sick! You remember when I gave you his message that Tuesday? Well, afterward I got thinking and I knew we'd have to get little Bessie and hold her as a witness before her mother and uncle rushed her out of town somewhere. I stayed in the office most of Tuesday afternoon and then went up to her house to see if I couldn't get hold of her. I didn't have any luck. I came back in time for you to take me home, Mr. Powell, but I was up where Bessie lived at seven the next morning in the vestibule when she slipped out with a kitten in her arms.

"She was afraid to speak to me at first and said her mamma had punished her for talking to me the day before. They were going away right off, to the country, but her uncle said they'd have to leave the kitty behind and she had run out to give it to a little girl across the street.

"I told her Joe was in trouble, that Mr. Nichols really was a friend of his, and I'd come to take her to Joe, so he could give her a message for her uncle. I piled her and the kitten into the taxi that had brought me up there and took them both to a woman I know down on the East Side, who—who don't ask many questions. She kept Bessie for me till Friday when the case came up, and in the meantime I sent Mr. Lazenby to Bessie and he explained what she was to do to help Joe and her uncle. It—it was a kind of a mean trick to play on her, but after all it was justice, wasn't it?"

She glanced appealingly around the table and Rex said:

"It was necessary, vital, and her uncle himself will get off lightly. But I don't understand! I called for you on Wednesday

morning and brought you to the office. You were gone when I called for you in the evening to take you home."

"I know. After I left Bessie in good hands I hurried home so as to be there when you came for me." Ethel flushed. "I was worried all the morning because Mr. Nichols didn't come in, for I knew he was on trail of that 'Joe' and I was afraid something must have happened to him! In the afternoon Mr. Howe came and left word for Mr. Nichols that he was on Lucy Regnier's trail, and it came to me in a flash that if I followed him I could find Joe myself, for Mr. Nichols had spoken of the Regnier woman to Bessie, and I knew she was mixed up in it."

"Holy cat!" Phil Howe stared. "You didn't trail me to Al's—"

"I followed you to a cheap flat away up near the Concourse, and I was right at your heels that night when you trailed a woman and a young man who'd called for her down to Hester Street and back uptown again."

Ethel's tone was meek, but an irrepressible dimple showed in her cheek and her downcast eyes were twinkling. "Then they separated and you and I followed the woman to that saloon that was wide open. I saw Mr. Nichols then, hanging around outside, and when the woman came out with another young man and you started to follow them Mr. Nichols slipped in behind, and I—I finished the procession! It was good they took the subway, so there were cars enough on the train for all of us, and I only had to watch Mr. Nichols, who was up front in the same car with me, to keep in line.

"I was just half a block behind when we all straggled to that alley back of the pawnshop and I saw Mr. Nichols slide around past where you were hiding and watching the woman, down into the cellar where she had left the young man. I wanted to go after him, but I was afraid Mr. Howe would spot me. Then the woman went into the cellar next door with him following and me just behind, and the shooting started!

"I was the last one through that connecting door when he turned on the lights,

and I saw Mr. Nichols fall and that young fellow shooting wild! I—I made him drop his gun and then he went all to pieces and Mr. Howe and I got him off to that place you call Pink-Eye Mike's just before the police came. I never in the world would have left Mr. Nichols hurt like that, only Mr. Howe showed me that he would want us to finish his work for him!"

Ethel paused and then added: "Isn't it fine that Mr. Monckton's girl didn't go back on him, after all? Did you see the papers yesterday? I told him so when I saw him in the Tombs, but that was only to make him feel better; I didn't really believe she'd stick, though I hoped so!"

The Shadowers exchanged relieved glances, and then George Roper asked:

"Wouldn't you stick yourself, Ethel? By the way, how is that angelic dog you brought here when you first came back to us three weeks ago?"

"I gave him away to somebody who don't know his disposition!" Ethel saw that the six pair of eyes were upon her and flushed more deeply than ever as she glanced down at her waist, no longer adorned with its accustomed corsage bouquet. "Miss Norcross was in love with Mr. Monckton, I guess, even if she couldn't

quite believe at first that he was innocent, but this love business is a lot of bunk, anyway! It's catching, but half the time people don't know whether they've got it or not!"

Phil roared and even George chuckled, but Rex Powell said very seriously:

"They are both very grateful to you, Ethel. We've received from Mr. Monckton the largest check of our career as the Shadowers, but see what he and Miss Norcross have sent you together!"

He opened the jewel case and displayed a single string of pearls, small but perfectly matched and of an exquisitely glowing luster.

Ethel gave a little gasp of pure delight and clasped them about her throat. Then the whimsical little smile they knew so well came over her face and she exclaimed:

"It's wonderful of them, but I couldn't have put them on last week, not with the other reward I got for finding Bessie!"

"What do you mean?" Rex demanded.

"Mumps!" Ethel made a little grimace. "I caught them from her, and I wouldn't let you know for fear you'd laugh! But all of us together made the greatest catch of the Shadowers yet, didn't we, when we found the murderer of De Puyster Monckton?"

THE END



CHANGE THAT RECORD!

OF a "silver-haired" mother the ballads all rave,
 With her "dear toil-worn hands," and one foot in the grave.
 I'm sure, with a parent like that, I would smother,
 I greatly prefer my own dear modern mother.

Her "form" is not "bent," nor her face "lined with care,"
 And she wears no gray bonnet on her pretty hair.
 Her clothes are perfection; her figure's divine,
 As for her complexion, it's better than mine.

Her mind is not centered on thoughts of "the grave,"
 She is far more concerned with her permanent wave.
 And oh, but I'm glad that she's not like that other—
 My gay little, chic little, up-to-date mother!

Vivien Chandler.



What Steve Brodie Did

By JACK BECHDOLT

BARNEY WILDER read in a book purporting to tell young men how to succeed: "Dare! Always ask for the best. Only a second rater will accept a substitute for his heart's desire."

"Sure," Barney agreed. "Look't Steve Brodie! He might have jumped off street cars all his life and all it would have got him was fallen arches. But he jumps off the Brooklyn Bridge and got famous. Take a chance, that's the idea!"

Barney was an ardent disciple of the late Brodie. He asked for a raise in pay that fall when the Discus Forwarding Company was cutting down its payroll.

"I don't say you don't deserve more, Wilder," said McKee, head of the freight claims department and Barney's immediate

boss. "You've worked for us six months and done good work, but—"

"Then I get the raise?" Barney grinned cheerfully.

"The company's laying off men and it's cut down some of the top notch salaries, too," McKee explained. "Of course, if you insist I'll present your application to Mr. McGonigle. And I'll recommend it, too. But it might make him sore. You're taking a chance—"

"Steve Brodie did," Barney remarked. "Shove it along, will you?" Barney went back to his desk and worked harder than ever, feeling he owed the firm more for the additional five dollars a week they were sure to give him.

Saturday afternoon McKee called Barney

to his office. "It's the glad news," Barney predicted to himself as he answered the call.

"I'm sorry, Barney," McKee said, "but Mr. McGonigle refuses to grant your request for more salary—"

"Oh, well," Barney said generously. "I'd never have found out if I hadn't asked. No hard feelings, Mac—"

"Unfortunately, that's not all," McKee smiled grimly. Mr. McGonigle gave orders to fire you—"

Barney's jaw dropped. "I—I didn't quite hear that last, Mac—"

"I said you were fired. Don't blame me. But you made Mr. McGonigle sore, asking for that raise. Business isn't so good. He's irritable these days—"

"McGonigle fired me?"

"That's it."

Barney heard this time. He considered a minute, digesting the news. His big, capable hands doubled into fists. His thick, rounding chest heaved. His blue eyes snapped. "I'll talk to McGonigle," said Barney as he turned quickly on his heel.

"Barney!" McKee bounded from his chair and caught Barney by his muscular arm. "Nix," he advised earnestly, "lay off the old man!"

"He hasn't got any right to fire me," Barney said through set teeth. "He can't do it—"

"But he's done it," protested the shocked McKee.

"Then he can undo it—"

"Listen, Barney, you're only making useless trouble. The old man's like a bear with a sore head to-day. Don't take the chance—"

"Steve Brodie would," Barney retorted and tore himself from McKee's clutching hands.

Cassius McGonigle's office was at the far end of the building. Barney had never been near it before. At the door of the president and general manager of the Discus Forwarding Company a girl stenographer was on guard. Her head was bent as she read notes from her shorthand pad, while her fingers made the type keys talk like a rapid fire gun. Barney looked down upon

a poll of brown, slightly curly hair, bobbed at exactly the right length to entrance any man.

"Mr. McGonigle in?" he asked.

The girl looked up to answer him and showed him a face that was instantly Barney's standard of womanly beauty, a face to which he would compare all other women's faces—and find them lacking.

"Yes, he's in," the girl said with peculiar emphasis. "Is your business important?"

"I'm Barney Wilder of the freight claims department," replied Barney. "He just fired me and I'm going to make him take it back. I guess that's important—"

"I guess it is, Mr. Wilder, but I don't think I'd bother him just now."

"I'm going in," said Barney.

"Well, I wouldn't take the risk."

Barney paused to grin at her. "Ever hear of Steve Brodie?"

"My, yes! But all he did was jump off Brooklyn Bridge. I guess you never met Mr. McGonigle—"

"I'm about to have the pleasure," Barney said and strode past her.

Half an hour later McKee found Barney in the washroom, laving a cut across his cheek and a blackening eye. "McGonigle fired the telephone book at me," Barney explained. "Then he threw me out of his office and I slammed into the door—it was standing ajar, and caught this shiner. I ought to have hit him, Mac, but he's a lot older than I am. I was afraid of hurting him."

McKee wrung his hands. "Good heavens," he said, "this is awful! I never heard of such a damn fool as you are—"

"I guess it's the first time McGonigle ever heard of one, too," Barney agreed. "I saw it wasn't any use arguing, after that. I resigned my job."

"It's a darn shame," McKee sympathized. "But I told you not to ask for a raise—"

"Oh, well, there are lots of other jobs—"

"Not so many as there used to be, not now," McKee cautioned. "And when winter comes—say, Barney, you won't get sore if I give you some well meant advice?"

"Never got sore at a friend in my life, Mac."

"Well, it's this. You're just fresh from the country—" McKee paused, struck by a diverting idea. "*Fresh* is right!" he exclaimed with a grin. "But what I mean is, you're not well up on city ways—and job hunting. And winter's coming and it looks like a hard winter. Now your—your personal appearance: Of course you're always clean and neat enough, and all that, but in New York when you look for work you want to throw a bluff. Look as if you didn't need work. Dress like a fellow who's been taking his pick of fancy jobs, get me? If you haven't got it, buy yourself a good front, good clothes I mean and wear all the scenery when you go out looking. It'll get you a lot better job than you deserve. Nothing succeeds like success—or the appearance of success—you know. Will you follow my tip, Barney?"

"Well, while I've got some money saved, Mac, not much, but a little, I'm not keen about spending it on clothes, now that I'm off the payroll. Never cared much about fancy dressing anyway. But maybe it is good business. I'll buy some scenery—"

"That's right," McKee approved, "you'll need it."

Barney Wilder had lived economically in a quiet boarding house on a West Side street as the credit of several hundred dollars in his bank book testified. He contemplated the bank balance with qualms of doubt a few days after leaving the Discus Forwarding Company by request of McGonigle.

"It looked big, when I had a pay envelope coming in every week," Barney mused. "Funny how small it looks now! I hate to spend a nickel on anything foolish like clothes!" His hand trembled and he wrote several checks for varying amounts and destroyed them as he wrote them. Finally he drew a check for a hundred dollars to his own name and shoved it through the cashier's window. "That'll buy me a swell overcoat, hat and shoes," Barney figured. "It's taking a chance with a lot of money, but I guess Mac is right. I've got to look prosperous to keep up with competition. I'll risk it."

The hundred dollars did wonders with the outward semblance of Barney Wilder. A tan overcoat of beautiful, light but warm

fleecy material, a light tan hat and dark tan shoes draped his big form and unconsciously his courage rose when he saw his reflection in a mirror.

"Ever hear of Steve Brodie?" Barney asked the clothier who was standing just behind him, admiringly smoothing the perfectly fitted shoulders.

"No," said the merchant. "Friend of yours?"

Barney sighed anxiously, "I hope he is! He's costing me a lot of money."

Barney went into the street looking like a successful world's champion heavyweight. The big overcoat concealed every suggestion that the clothes beneath were competent but getting a little worn and at their best were no better than the ready-made, standardized product one could buy in Barney's native Vermont village. The day was not very cold, just a fine, brilliant, sunshiny November day. Before he had gone a block, Barney, who was decidedly healthy and active had unbuttoned the coat. Midway of a second block he was obliged to strip it off and carry it over his arm. "Whoof," said Barney, "if winter doesn't come soon most of my hundred dollars is wasted. I can't stand wearing this blanket, job or no job."

Barney read the classified advertising in the morning and evening newspapers. The humble two line statements that a man was wanted to keep books or bill customers or collect accounts or make himself useful, did not interest him. He specialized on the opportunities for an office manager, factory manager, department head, executive and such plums. He wanted a job as good as his friend McKee held. "I want the best. I've got as much ability and experience as Mac," he argued. "What's the use going after something any roughneck can do? Especially after I've blown a hundred dollars on a new outfit of scenery!"

He applied in person and wrote innumerable letters and went to appointed interviews, always in the big tan coat.

Barney started forth in the magnificent coat, but seldom arrived in his glory. November continued fine with no more than a hint of winter in its air and more often reminiscences of Indian summer. Even Barney's firmest resolution to display his

prosperous scenery vanished when he had to wait in steam heated offices to see prospective employers. He invariably appeared with the coat over his arm, clad neatly but plainly like any man who had never earned more than twenty-five dollars a week. Those to whom he represented himself as an executive of experience glanced at his clothes and evaded his application for work. Barney scanned the weather forecast in the daily papers even before he read the Help Wanted columns. "If winter doesn't come pretty soon, I'm sunk," he groaned.

After a fruitless day Barney walked across town in the direction of his boarding house. The evening was turning decidedly frosty, a chill wind blew off the Jersey Palisades and Barney was glad of his big coat.

In the shadows under the elevated railway Barney saw a small crowd staring up at the structure. He elbowed his way into the group. "What's doing?" he asked.

Somebody explained obligingly: "They's a kitten up there under the tracks, see it? Dog chased it up, I guess."

Faintly discernible as a fluffy, white blur Barney spied the huddled kitten. It voiced its unhappiness in sharp, piercing mews.

"Why don't somebody get it down?" Barney demanded.

There was a general shaking of heads. "Don't catch me monkeying around that third rail!" one man said. "Yes, and a train's likely to come along and knock you for a goal," added another.

"Look out! It's climbing onto the rails! It's a goner now!"

"There comes the train!"

"Oh, shucks!" Barney growled. "You're a fine lot of dumb-bells! I'm going after it—"

"Look out, mister—"

"Don't do that. The train's coming—"

"Better not chance it, buddy!"

Barney was struggling out of his big coat. "Steve Brodie took a chance," he muttered, disgusted, "but it looks like he was the last New Yorker ever did! Here—hold my coat!" He thrust the precious bundle into the first hands that offered and began to climb the pillar of the Elevated structure.

The steel pillar was laced with iron cross braces and it was an easy matter to climb it. Barney got head and shoulders into the space just beneath the ties and reached his hand through to grasp the trembling kitten.

The rails were humming with the approach of a train.

As Barney reached the terrified animal it leaped to another tie and evaded his fingers. He had to withdraw his arm from one space and reach again farther off. His fingers touched the kitten and closed over it. With the animal in his fist he ducked his head swiftly, withdrew his arm and huddled, while over his head a foot or two distant the train roared. Barney was badly shaken, deafened by the racket and rather breathless. He clung a moment longer before he descended.

A woman confronted him as he came down.

"Oh, thank you!" she was saying. "Thank you so much!"

"Is it yours?"

"Yes. We just found he had got out from the flat! You were awfully brave to rescue Toto!"

"Me and Steve Brodie!" Barney grinned. He saw that the kitten's owner was young and bareheaded and breathless. He saw more, something that made him stare. She was staring, too.

"Why," she exclaimed, "Mr. Wilder!"

"Sure enough," said Barney, "I remember you. You work for McGonigle! You don't tell me you live around here?"

"Indeed, I do," said McGonigle's secretary. "I've lived in the Hudson Arms for five years."

"And my boarding house isn't half a block from you. Think of that!" Barney beamed. "That shows it pays to pull a Brodie," he remarked in self-congratulation. "If I hadn't taken a chance in fishing out your kitten I'd never have known all this!"

The rescue being over the crowd dispersed and left them beaming on each other.

"Let me see you home," Barney offered.

"Indeed, I will. I don't think we were ever introduced. I am Belle Crawford, Mr.

Wilder. I—I hope you'll call and let mother thank you. It's really her kitten."

With eyes only for Belle Crawford, ears tuned only to her delightful voice, heart that was all hers, Barney walked with her to the apartment house. There they parted with his promise to call that evening. Barney turned away into the cold, sharp breeze. "Holy smoke!" he gasped. "My overcoat!"

Barney ran back to the corner. Nobody remained of the little group that had watched his daring act so recently. He visited the small shops of the neighborhood. Nobody had left an overcoat to be identified by a kitten rescuer. Barney found a dashing young policeman and consulted him and he, too, searched in vain. It dawned on Barney Wilder that his coat was stolen.

At the same instant he realized that, judging by all present indications, he would get one of his dearest wishes. Winter was coming. In fact, winter had arrived.

II.

BARNEY was calling on Belle Crawford and her mother in their two room and kitchenette flat in the Hudson Arms. This was three weeks after the rescue of the kitten, and Barney had called so often that he was on the footing of an old friend of the family.

"I found the job I was looking for," Barney beamed at Belle.

"Oh, Barney, that's great! Congratulations—"

"Wait a minute! I don't mean I've got it yet. I mean I ran across the very kind of job I want and can hold. And I think I stand a chance to get it. You see, about a week ago I read an ad wanting a man for executive work, 'one who has enough backbone to handle men,' it said. The advertiser asked applicants to write. I wrote him and, look, to-day I get this note. It's from Watkins, the president of the Germless Ice Company—"

"Gracious, Barney, they sell half of the ice used in New York!"

"I know it. And, listen, he says: 'I would be pleased to have Mr. Wilder call at my office at nine o'clock Friday morning, this week, for a personal interview.'"

Belle's high spirits were somewhat dashed. Barney observed it. "I know, most of 'em answer like that," he said, "but somehow I feel different about this chance. It's the kind of work I want. Executive work, like McKee's got. A job handling men, a job that needs some backbone. I can do that—"

"Of course you can!"

Barney's happiness clouded. "If I just had my swell benny back," he sighed. "This looking like a bum sort of gets my goat!"

"Barney, you poor boy! Without an overcoat—"

"I don't mind the cold," Barney explained. "It's all right, if you walk fast. But there's always a lot of cake eaters after these jobs that look like they'd just stepped out of a musical show—"

"Poor Barney!"

"Sometimes I wish I hadn't given my other coat to the Salvation Army last spring," Barney sighed. "Still, the cuffs were worn shiny and the moths ate a couple holes in it. Maybe it would just knock my chances if I did wear it—"

Belle patted his hand in sisterly encouragement. "You stay with it, Barney!"

"Yea!" Barney agreed, smiling again. "While the money lasts I'll stay with it and I've got enough to pay my rent and board for another week. While I've got that, no cheap job for me, coat or no coat. Unless, of course, Belle, you think I'm taking too big a risk—"

"Remember Steve Brodie, Barney."

"Yea, bo!"

Belle sat tracing patterns on her dress, eyes downcast. Barney sat bolt upright, struggling mentally. Barney wanted to say something and lacked the courage to say it. Barney's courage was beginning to stagger under repeated blows. The loss of his job had been the first jolt. The loss of his expensive coat had been another. The worst blow of all was the effect of repeated failure in the search for employment, failure that he began to attribute to his lack of the big, prosperous overcoat. Outwardly Barney was still presentable. It was his soul that was wearing shabby, and a shabby soul makes a shabby man.

If only he had his coat back, Barney reflected bitterly, everything would be all right. He would cease to cringe at the curious, sometimes scornful glances of his fellow men. He would cease to be a craven coward, afraid to say to Belle Crawford what his heart was bursting to say.

"Steve Brodie did!" Barney muttered, wrung with pain.

"Steve Brodie did what, Barney?"

"Nothing, Belle. Gee, I wish I had my brown benny back!"

The doorbell rang loudly and repeatedly.

Belle answered the ring and ushered in a young policeman. Barney recognized him with a loud, "Hello!"

"Sorry to intrude," the policeman apologized. "Wilder's landlady said I might find him here. About that overcoat—we got the fellow that stole it. He was trying to sell it to a hock shop. Can you come over to the station and identify the coat so's we can make a charge?"

Barney sprang up, grinning. "I got it!" he cried. "I got my benny back! Talk about luck, I got it back in time to go after that job!" Barney expanded visibly as though the big, brown, prosperous coat already incased him. "Somebody try to keep me out of that job now!" he gloated. So restored was all his old-time confidence he would have forthwith swept the smiling Belle Crawford into his arms and kissed her, had not the presence of her mother and the patrolman put a brake on his impulse.

At the district police station Barney identified the coat and beheld it again with a wide smile.

"You be at Jefferson Market Court at ten o'clock Monday morning, sure," the lieutenant in charge instructed him.

Barney promised. "This is certainly going to come in handy," he grinned, reaching for the coat. "I've got to talk to a man about getting a job to-morrow morning, and I need my scenery—"

"Here, you can't have that coat!" the lieutenant cried.

"What do you mean, I can't have it? It's my coat—"

"Not right now, it isn't. It's the law's coat. This coat has got to be exhibit A in

the case of People *versus* John Doe, Monday morning, see?"

"Sure, that's all right about next Monday," Barney agreed, reasonably. "But look! I've got to wear it to-morrow morning to see a man in—"

The lieutenant shook his head.

"Sure, I have!" Barney exclaimed. "It's an appointment to get a job. See, here's his letter—"

"I'm not keeping you from it. Go ahead. But I've got to keep the evidence. That's my job—"

"Well—well, listen! Just listen a minute! That coat is my scenery, d'ya see? I got to look right or I won't get this job—"

"And I've got to hold the job I've already got," said the lieutenant. "And that job is to hold your coat—"

"Listen, have a heart! It's snowing terribly outside—"

"You look husky—"

"It ain't a question of looking husky. I've got to look like I had money—"

"Not in this coat—"

"For just an hour, then, while I talk to this party. Let me borrow it in the morning—"

"No."

"You can send a cop along to watch it."

"No."

"I'm honest. Take a chance on me."

"No."

"Aw, Steve Brodie would—"

"Steve Brodie ain't working here. Outside for you, my boy!"

Barney turned away slowly, unable to credit this culmination of his woes. The friendly young patrolman whispered a suggestion to the lieutenant. The lieutenant beckoned Barney back. "I got a heart," he explained. "You go see the judge, and if he gives you a court order you can wear your coat till the case is called. There's just a chance that you can get away with it."

"Chance! Show me *any* chance."

"See the judge, then. To-morrow morning, Jefferson Market, nine o'clock."

Nine o'clock. The words spelled Barney's doom. His head sank again. He plodded out of the station beyond words to

express his feelings, plodded out into the driving snow, coatless.

III.

It not only snowed next morning, the snow was blowing in blinding clouds of hard, white dust. The air was bitter.

Barney hesitated at eight thirty on the steps of his boarding house, staring over the gray, desolate, cold world.

"What's the use?" he cried. "If I don't freeze to death before I get there I'll be thrown out for a bum, anyway. Some slicker in a trick fur coat will get that job, just because he looks like he didn't need it! For a nickel I'd go around and get a job shoveling in coal."

Nobody was around to offer Barney a nickel. Nobody was around. It was that kind of a day.

He thrust his hands deep into his trousers pockets, turned up his inadequate coat collar, hunched his shoulders and started out, head down into the blizzard.

Black pessimism struggled along at his elbow and rode with him through the subway and dogged his slipping, uncertain steps through the business district down town, where the blizzard raged with doubled fury.

Barney tried to reason the depression away. It's a chance, he figured. A man had to grab at every chance that offered or cease to act like a man. Look what Steve Brodie did!

He lifted his head to survey the street crossing and choose a way through crowding vehicles.

The blizzard wind tore the new tan hat from his head and tossed it under the wheels of a passing truck. When Barney reached the mangled felt it was quite useless as a hat.

Bareheaded in that blast he threw the sodden handful in the gutter and dared Fate to do more to him.

"There's a chance yet," he muttered and plowed on, with the snow freezing into the folds of his clothing.

The corridor of the big office building smote him with a hot, steamy breath. Barney kicked the caked snow from his shoes and plodded doggedly to an elevator, con-

scious that he was a mark of considerable attention.

The large, handsome outer office of the president's suite on the Germless Ice Company's entire floor held a long bench, and the bench was occupied to capacity by a number of prosperous, contented appearing men of varying ages, but unvarying appearance of prosperity and well being. They turned interested and amused glances on the hatless, coatless apparition. Barney hesitated a moment at the door. He was minded to flee.

"Steve Brodie did it!" he muttered faintly and stepped in to present his letter of appointment. There being no room on the waiting bench he was obliged to stand in a corner, conscious of being an object of some amusement and trying angrily to stare down the starers.

Barney chafed at his cold, numbed wrists, rubbed his chill, half frozen cheeks, snuffed and waited. The benchful of prosperous looking applicants for the job, some with fur coats, some with fur collared coats, the meanest decked out in checkerboard tweeds of exceeding thickness and style, stared at him and waited.

A door to an inner office opened. A short, thick-set man with exceedingly ruddy complexion and bushy, snow-white hair, glared at the company. To a secretary he remarked briskly, "That man first," and pointed out Barney.

"Bring your hat and coat, please," the secretary gabbled briskly. "Mr. Watkins will let you out of the private entrance to his office."

"Got no hat and coat," Barney announced grimly.

"What?"

Barney raised his voice angrily. "I said I've got no hat and coat. Don't wear 'em. Don't believe in wearing 'em. I'm no hot-house mollycoddle." He put it loud and bluntly for the benefit of all. He glared at them, ready to fight at the first flicker of a grin.

"Here, what's that? What do you say?" Watkins had turned back from his doorway.

"I said I didn't wear a hat and coat," Barney repeated belligerently. "If wear-

ing a hat and coat's got anything to do with this job, you can count me out. I'm a fresh air fan, let me tell you, and I don't believe in 'them—"

"You don't wear any in midwinter?" Watkins exclaimed.

"I guess I don't have to if I don't want to! I guess a man's got a right to dress any way that's best for his health. This is the way I dress. It's healthy, too! And I like it."

"You do!" Watkins exclaimed.

"Yes, I do—"

Watkins turned on the roomful. "You hear?" he said, delighted. "Forty years, gentlemen, I've been preaching the folly of bundling up the human body in a lot of useless wrapping. Forty years I've preached and practiced it—wear the same medium weight clothing winter and summer. No hat in any weather to preserve a healthy scalp. Forty years and here's the first kindred soul I ever met that had the courage to live up to what I've preached. Come in, Mr.—Mr.—"

"Mr. Wilder," Barney supplied.

"Come right in, Mr. Wilder! I'm delighted to meet you!"

IV.

"It's a great job!" Barney explained eagerly to Belle Crawford that evening. "I'm going to be superintendent of the wagon drivers that peddle Germless ice. I start in to-morrow, and I get fifty dollars a week right at the beginning. And the reason I got it was because Watkins wanted a husky—some guy that doesn't have to bundle all up in an overcoat every time the snow falls—"

The door bell rang again. The young policeman stood outside, smiling, over his arm Barney's brown coat. The young policeman had a bigger heart than his lieutenant. He had personally been a around to see the judge and got a court order releasing the evidence.

Belle Crawford turned aside hurriedly to answer the ring at her door.

"Wait!" Barney cried, masterfully turning her back. "I got something to say to you. Something I got to say right now.

I—Belle, I—" His voice stuck in his throat. "I haven't known you very long, Belle," Barney faltered; "maybe I'm taking too big a chance—"

Belle Crawford smiled at him demurely. "Remember Steve Brodie, Barney," she prompted.

The door bell continued to ring, and nobody answered it. The young policeman, the coat over his arm, turned aside finally, scratching his head. "I'd have sworn I heard somebody in there," he muttered. "But, of course, if he don't want his coat, I should worry!"

V.

It was not snowing when Barney reported for work at the offices of the Germless Ice Company Monday morning.

It had snowed all Friday, all Saturday, and all Sunday night. The drifts were five feet deep in cross streets. But it did not snow Monday. The sky had frozen so hard that not a flake of snow leaked out.

Barney went to work minus overcoat and hat.

Belle had protested with all the fervor of a recently engaged woman trying to win her first big battle. It was no use.

"I can't do it!" Barney protested. "Not even for you. It isn't a matter of false pride at all. Now that I'm one of the family I'd just as soon borrow the price of a kelly and a benny from you as I would from anybody. That ain't the point! But if I give in now and wear a coat old Duckworth will know I'm a false alarm and not any snowbird at all. Then he'll fire me before even I begin! Then I can't marry you next spring—"

"Barney! It's suicide! You must not risk it—"

"Steve Brodie took a chance," Barney retorted, and that ended the argument so far as he was concerned.

Barney ran from the subway station to the big ice warehouse down by the river where a sportive sixty miles wind was blowing the drifted snow in eddies and whorls. The flakes were flakes no longer. Each particle of snow had become a sharp-edged cake of ice, and the boreal breeze hurled them in a mighty sandblast.

His face was flayed raw by the sportive wind.

His feet and legs felt like wooden stilts.

Tears streamed from his eyes.

"Steve Brodie did it!" he gasped, and staggered the last half block, visions of warmth inside keeping up his courage.

Blocks of solid ice were thundering down the chutes into waiting wagons. Barney shuddered and burst in the door. A breath more bitter cold than outside hit him like a rock heaved at his chest.

He spied a small, partitioned office from which came a warm glow of light. He staggered to it. There was a jolly, round-bellied stove within and there he established himself to take up his new duties.

About half an hour later Watkins came down from the main offices to visit his new superintendent. Barney's feet and legs had just reached the point of reminding him they were still his property. He had managed finally to clamp his numbed fingers about a pencil and make marks on paper.

"This place is close!" said the president of the Germless Ice Company severely. "It's abominable. A menace to health. But don't you worry, Wilder. I'll remedy that! The health of my employees is my first consideration. We'll have that stove yanked out of here before you can say 'Scat!' Meantime we'll look over the plant.

"Come on, boy! Out into the cold, fresh air, that's what you need. Come along, I want to show you my pride, the achievement of a lifetime, the biggest ice warehouse in the world. Mountains of it, boy! Uncounted tons of pure, germless ice, glistening like pure diamonds. It's the one place in New York where a man can draw a breath of air that really stings his lungs!"

It didn't snow any more for days. It just kept on getting colder.

Inside of his clothing Barney wrapped layer on layer of newspaper until his every move sounded like the crackling of thorns under a pot.

At the end of the week President Watkins visited him again.

"This is better," he declared joyously, beaming on the unheated office. "Notice

how much sweeter the air is with those windows all removed. You get that sharp tang that comes right off all my stored ice—"

Barney checked his clicking teeth long enough to voice an agreement.

"And now, my boy," said the beaming president of the Germless Ice Company, "you've proved to me you can make good. I have a pleasant change for you next week. Be ready Monday morning to go with me on an inspection trip. I want to look over a couple of lakes that have been offered to us. They're up in Maine, just below the Canadian border. Some little trip, eh! Think of it, boy, days of tramping through the frozen drifts and never a minute when the mercury gets its head above zero! If we're lucky we may get a chance to sleep out all night, right in the snow!"

"Steve Brodie did it," Barney muttered, his teeth syncopating the words, the while he massaged his numb ear with a splinter of ice.

"What's that?"

"I said, sure, that 'll be fine, Mr. Watkins!"

On the bitterest morning of winter, Barney reported himself at the office. Watkins was not there. He had left a note:

So sorry. Called to New Brunswick for the next three weeks. May make that trip later, but I can't promise you real zero weather.

Barney grasped the import of this news with a yell. He dashed from the office and the building, hailed a taxi regardless of expense, and gasped the address of the district police station.

Into the station Barney burst like a bomb.

"I want my benny!" he gasped. "Show me the judge that's holding out my new brown benny and I'll talk him out of it if he's got a heart of marble."

"It's here," said the smiling lieutenant in charge. "Been waiting for you here all week. I guess it has to turn off pretty sharp before you bundle up, old-timer?"

"Sharp enough for me right now," Barney agreed. "I got my health to consider. Going to be married next spring, and I can't take any chances."



A River Combine- Professional

By **RAYMOND S. SPEARS**

I DON'T know 'f I eveh told you about Stepping May or not. She came down the river a while back in a clinker built skiff. She was so blamed pretty it was a wonder they ever let her come down the banks onto old Mississip' at all; but theh she was, big as life—about five foot seven tall, and her lips straight and resentful, but her eyes twinkling. You see, a lady lots of times keeps her jaw set square when she'd rather be smiling two foot wide. Lots of men can't let a lady grin without thinkin' she's soft on 'em.

The first test I seen of Stepping May was along about Hickman, Kentucky, one of those mean, miserable days when the autumn northers begin to whisper an' growl down out o' the ice cap mountains. Hadn't begun to rain yet, but hit was mean. I was into my green cabin boat which I

bought off a feller who built it up the Alleghany in N'York State to trip down to N'Orleans, but found the Ohio so big he neveh had the grit to see old Mississip' at all. Theh I was, jes' plumb comfy, an' this blamed gal come along—pretty as a picture, an' jes' about as accommodating.

She hearn my fiddle talking along, so she pulled up an' hailed. I stepped outside, not thinkin' what I was doing, an' course, the minute that wind hit my warm fiddle strings, snp! An' I had two broken.

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" she said, the way a girl does when she knows what she's talking about. "I didn't mean to do that!"

She was cold, her cheeks red, an' her hands reddish. You know how a man feels when he knows he ought to ask a lady something, but expects she'll sure miscue 'im. I had a good cabin, warm, two chairs

—comfortable! I didn't know what to say, so she said hit herself. If only ladies 'd speak first their feelings, hit'd be lots nicer, wouldn't it, for men? Lots an' lots of times a man passes up something he'd like to do, probably he'd oughta do, jes' account of him bein' 'fraid a lady'd be insulted, or like that.

"Mr. Man," she said, her eyes sparkling, "I'm 'most froze to death! Won't yo' let me stand by yo' fire an' warm?"

Why, say, I just told that gal she could have my whole blamed shanty boat if hit 'd 'commode her any. She laughed, and come aboard, dropping a bowline on my bumper cleat, trailing the skiff alongside.

I give her my fiddling chair, but she took t'other one. We sat theh while she warmed her red hands an' I strung up my bow. When I 'gun to play, she turned her head to listen—sharp! Naturally, I ain't much of a talker, far as the ladies is concerned, but they don't embarrass me none when I'm playing, which helps me forget how pretty they is, or something, I don't know what.

She listened so blamed int'rested I was wondering, for the music was "Caving Bends." Yo' know that piece, which started 'way back yonder, which all the riveh fiddlers has played just natural, till now everybody knows hit? Played right, yo' can hear the water suckling an' sawing along the bend, an' then the lumping-lumping down as the ground falls in, a tree swings out and falls a splashing, and all good music, which you can dance by.

"Oh, what's that?" she asked.

I knowed right away she wasn't a riveh gal, but like me, from up the banks, though more recent. So I told her "Caving Bends." Then I told her about some more river music: "Cyclone," "Crossing Ripples," "Steamboat," "Spring Birds," "Cold Winds," "Sandbar Whispers"—theh's a lot of those funny musics that jes' imitate the way the old Mississip' sounds one time an' anotheh, which anybody could play if he's good at slidin' notes an' picking an' knows the riveh.

"Riveh music!" she whispered. "Why—why, I didn't know they had music like that! You know—I dance!"

While I played "Crossing Ripples," she danced, too. Lawse, that gal was steppin'! I jes' looked at her. She was professional, I could see that—but more than professional, too, somehow. She had to 'dapt her stepping to the music, finding which was best, if shuffling and sliding or tap-tap or lifting and floating. Seemed like I played twict as good as I'd eveh played in my life before.

My cabin was six foot four high, an' there was about eight by ten foot square she could dance in; hit wan't any too much, but she used all the floor an' most of the roof, so to speak. She'd dance a round or two, an' then she'd sit an' ask me questions. That was about the busiest afternoon I remember, and 'fore I knowed hit, night had come, closing down on the riveh like a door, taking me right by surprise!

"Oh, it's dark!" she cried, waking up.

I jumped out, give a look around, an' then pulled for the west bank. Lucky hit was the foot of a long bend, an' I anchored in the eddy at the head of the bar—I don't know which bar, either. Somewhere below Putney Bend, anyhow, an' she stood nervous and doubtful as she looked out into that black night.

"We better cook supper," I told her. "You've a tarpaulin so's you can sleep into your skiff?"

"Oh, yes!" she said. "I sleep into it."

I lighted a big round burner lamp I had, and we stretched her tarpaulin over the hoops, for it seemed like rain was right theh. Then we cooked supper on my oil stove, she being mighty good at hot bread, while I ain't no slouch cooking meat. Course, I'm one of those people that always has a plenty to eat on board, even if I am a fiddler. I made good money. I'd come down the rivers just so I wouldn't be pestifered by neighbors and anybody, practicing my music all day an' all night, too, 'f I wanted to. We had a regular meal, which she ate of hearty, as I did, both being right hungry after all the work that afternoon—work we loved, but work, at that.

Afteh supper we cleared the table, washed the dishes—a man sure goes low down, leaving dishes to wash, if he's in a shanty

boat. Women can do things like that, but if a man does it, soon he ain't shaving, he don't take his cold bath, an' fustest he knows he's shiftless, no 'count, ragged, dirty, miserable.

I wondered who this girl was, course. She was brave—Lordy, but it took nerve for her to come down that coiling old running lake if she didn't have to! But she wasn't the kind of a girl anybody asks questions of, free and easy. When she danced she found her skirt too tight, and slipped it off so casual and easy that in trying to run the music right I didn't really notice she was in knickerbockers till afterward. Course, professional people are that-away. In no time we knowed we'd be teaming it.

We both were tired after supper. I stirred up the soft coal I'd found in a tow barge wreck on a sandbar, opening up the front gates in the fireplace stove I had for a heater. She sat into a low rocking chair, and I kittering across from her in an old armchair I'd picked up in a drift pile. I'd relined my shanty cabin with building paper, but some curling wisps of cold circled around from the north wind so the fire felt mighty comfortable.

"How come hit you're a shanty boater?" she asked, quick as that.

Course, nobody asks questions like that down the rivers if you ain't off the bank, or one of them writin' fellers or a sneakin' detective. I couldn't answer first off. A man don't tell even a pretty girl some things, and I mout say, specially a pretty girl. I knewed, though, I'd tell her when I'd laid tongue to words quiet enough to use.

"Why," I answered, careless like, after a minute, "I jes' come down. I jes' took my fiddle an' come down—"

"No you didn't!" She shook her head. "It wan't thataway. You know theory. You've taken lessons—real lessons, on the violin. Nobody who hadn't done that could play river music the way you do. Besides, you talk river talk like you learned it in school."

'Tain't no use trying to fool some women. I never met one I could fool. That's be'n my experience. Perhaps some's

there's women I could hoodwink, but they ain't on old Mississipp'!

"Course, I'm from up the bank," I admitted. "I just tripped away down same's anybody."

"Same as anybody!" she nodded. "That's so—I came because I couldn't stand bein' a dancing girl in a hick town! And you?"

"Why—why—" You know how a man don't talk of some things when he has to, an' can't get out of it. "I couldn't stand being a fiddler in a hick town, when—when—"

I couldn't say it. Some things hurt too much to say it.

"I know!" she said. "Somebody thought more of good business than of good music?"

"Jes' so!" I told her. "You know some girls, they don't want a fellow, a sweetheart, a husband that don't know nothing but music, sort of no 'count in the chamber of commerce and on Main Street."

"Yes, suh!" she nodded. "I'd no right to ask you. I wanted to know, I had to know. I could tell you was white, honest—the way a good man is when he thinks he's lost out. Musicians, artists, writers—big ones, but undiscovered—always feel they're mean an' trifling beside of good money makers. You're thataway!"

I hadn't never looked at hit before the way she put it. I jes' knowed I had a powerful big ache down around my heart, where I'd felt like a humming bird looking into a big rose in those old days. Yes, suh. Now I saw that girl lookin' into the fire, her eyes full. She had a mighty powerful mouth and jaw, but she hadn't no way of controlling her eyes. They'd twinkle, and they'd fill up, the way they had, feeling sorry for me. I reckon just that one look I had at her face before that fire in the red light—I was obliged to save kerosene, an' she'd turned the light down, knowing it, even if I did have lots to eat on board. You see—well, course a man picks up eats down the rivers—a shoat here, a yearling there; maybe some chicks and so on, besides game, if he's anyways slick and don't givvadamn.

"Prenaux!" she said to me, the first I

realized she knew my name. "I was sick of dancing in a hick town. You know those smart city kids, and those big footed country goofs. They never saw me dance. All they saw was—was legs. So I come down the river! Prob'ly I was a fool, only I wasn't. No, indeed! The first thing, in less'n ten days I heard your music—"

That's the way we found it down old Mississipp'. Lots come down who don't neveh find what they aches for. Men trip down an' down, an' floats, rollin' along the bottom into the gulf at last. Women is thataway, too—young ones an' old ones. But I knowed a preacher once who'd lost his hold, an' a business man who'd mixed in scandal, an' others what tried to lose themselves down the riveh—an' firstest they knowed the gates of happiness spread wide open for them.

Probably we understood each otheh that night as well as evah we would. There wan't much talkin' an' explainin'. We jes' had hit in ouh hearts. She stepped back, swung the chair clear, an' stepped four five measures without any music but the voices of the riveh dark—which she heard, an' I heard. She opened the bow door, bowed a pretty curtsy to me, an' shut the wind out the cabin. I caught up a lantern to hand to her, but she had one of her own under the skiff tarpaulin hood. Lawse, but that were a cozy eddy that night!

Well, suh, next day we had breakfast togetheh. She read some music I had, all kinds that I'd picked up for my fiddling. Course, when I came on the riveh, if music wasn't classic I sort of despised hit. But I'd been growing careless. I'd took to admiring the music river fiddlers played, some of it awful to listen to, but always, two three measures, perhaps one piece would be right out of the river's heart. I'd learn that piece. I'd maybe have to smooth it up, for my ear, account of somebody not knowing how to run the times together, or maybe breaking the refrains or splitting up the melodies the way mountain fiddlers do. Well, anyhow, every fiddler fixes his music oveh, according to his notions, the way I did.

An' when we'd settled our breakfasts, resting around, I brought out the old fiddle

to tighten up and tune the strings, an' she stepped, exercising to take out the kinks the cold an' sleeping on the bottom of her skiff'd hooked into her knees an' joints. An' her dancin' scales was purtier 'n some steppin' of lots of heel-an'-toe folks.

May Gardner was sure wonderful, even in those days, and patient. If some step bothered her, she'd work at it, steady, minutes, hours till she had it to the lift and fall of a ripple, while I played the music she wanted, steady, oveh an' oveh again. I hadn't practiced so much as I'd played. I used to let some hard places go. She made me go at those measures till my fingers and my bow'd walk through them, same as her dancing went through the swing, turn and change, the balance and the mark, the beat and the sway— Lawse, man! Hit wan't no work for me, but she'd toil along till she dropped into a chair, plumb wore out.

"Lucien!" she exclaimed, "you're so good to me. You don't know what it means—this chance to practice thisaway!"

You'd think one day was like anotheh, down the reaches and bends. We had to drop down pretty well, account of winter coming on. I remember when the fresh meat was gone, and we was down to sow-belly and corn, for I'd neglected providing. We hadn't any money. I was looking along for a flock of shoats on a bar, or maybe a steer caved down at a river bank; you know what I mean. I'd be'n on the riveh so long, staying my appetite thataway, never careless or being caught, that prob'ly I didn't rightly think about hit, the way I should of. I told her I'd have to lift a pig.

"Lucien Prenaux!" she turned on me, hard and set. "You shan't!"

We had hit out. She'd rather starve 'n steal, she said, and I hadn't. She had her way. Course, one way, it wan't none of her business how I found my grub. We weren't nothin' to each other, 'ceptin' we was professional partners. But in a way, we were eating together, floatin' down together, an' you mout say, tol'ably close together—if we hadn't be'n, her an' my boat tied together, we'd be'n miles apart, cut away by the current. So we jawed two three days, me not graftin' any meat, an' she arguin' there must be some honest way.

Yes, suh! Theh we was broke. I hadn't a cent. She hadn't any money. She went uptown in Mendova, an' come back smilin'. I was dog-gone hungry, an' she'd lost weight, practicin' on an empty stomach. She let her lips smile, when her eyes twinkled to me.

"We get five dollars for a turn into Palura's!" she told me.

Course it was her steppin', about four fifty for that, an' fifty cents for me. I'd never had the nerve to play for the public thataway, but she made me. We done a turn that night on Palura's stage. He was a flat-face feller, who'd killed three four men, an' his place was a show for everybody from N'Orleans to St. Louis.

I felt mighty swell when I sat in the corner, an' she came walkin' down in those white satin knickerbockers she'd put on special. I was jes' in my old pants, for I hadn't any other, an' a woolen shirt. I played for her to come a walking. Lawse! She'd jes' had them old knickers practicing. Now she was like a white rose grown up around a pink rose, for she was white an' pink dressed—and step? Seemed just like she'd practiced till now she was right.

Yes, suh! She was like a chimney swift flying, like a tall tree leaning before a strong wind, like the running waves on the flowing riveh—she just danced as natural as anything pretty you all eveh saw in motion, and not one step that wasn't beautiful. She danced fourteen minutes—that's how long it takes to play "Crossing Ripples" the way I do it, an' she faded out on it the way the riveh runs down a crossing into the fog, or night in a fast, bright sunset.

Yes, suh! Those people, up the bankers an' steamboaters, didn't make a sound or motion till long afteh I'd took down my fiddle an' was tightening up the E string. Seemed like the best we had to do wan't nothing to them. I felt like it wan't no use. I wanted to take May in my arms an' tell her we didn't cyar a whoopin' damn what they thought—then—slam!

Yes, suh! Those quality folks, who was spreein' down to Palura's, come down on the floor with both feet, an' split their gloves or stung their palms. I'd be'n afeared maybe Palura'd welch on that five

dollars an' we'd be hongry. Instead of that, when we was back in, he come an' handed May a twenty-dollar note, an' me the same. Forty dollars! I looked at hit. Seemed like it was a mistake—me twenty dollars! Just for fiddlin' that riveh piece.

Then Palura shoves us out on the stage again. I stood there flustered an' ready to cut an' run. May put her arm around my shoulders.

"Dear old boy! Dear old boy!" she exclaimed. "Let's have that 'Flying Swans' piece!"

"Tain't much of a piece. Watching the black geese, an' whooping cranes, an' brent an' Canadian geese flying by away up in the blue sky, their wings flashing in the sunshine, I'd—well, kind of set their motion to music. She always liked that piece. Course, no man can really set birds a-flyin' to music. Not Chopin, or Beethoven, or Wagner—not anybody. But I'd-made kind of a pitiful little stagger at it, which she loved, account of how much she thought of me. You know the way women is—anything somebody they like does is sorta in-t'restin' to them.

So I played what she said. I couldn't think of nothin' else. So she danced, which took their attention off what I was playing—and watching her, you know, she carried my music right along! I almost forgot I was playing. Yes, suh—she flew down the stage like great white swans fly down the line traveling out of the north, white, strong, shimmering. Lawse! Lawse! Seemed just like those quality folks sporting in Palura's inspired her to dance. An' I felt an ache in my heart, yes, suh!

You know how a man feels about a beautiful woman. He wants her to know how much he admires her. He wants to put at her feet all that he's got, all that he eveh can be in God's world. He'd put down his bleeding heart, with all its aches, for her to walk on; an' the pain of hit 'd be the greatest joy that he'd eveh know! All that kind of stuff—you know what I mean. An' he knows he cain't he'p her none. He cain't make her no better than he can he'p an oriole to sing, or an American lotus blossom to be lovely. All he can do is jes' wish he mout he'p some. An'

then his heart aches, for all he'd like to do—an' afteh all, it's somebody else that can he'p her. Theh those folks was—an' she danced like she'd neveh danced before, for them.

An' afteh hit was all oveh, those quality men came a walking up, a bowing in their dress suits, an' the women who'd split their gloves came up, and account of there bein' such a crowd around May they come to me, to talk, and tell me how nice it all was, May's dancing. And I stood there in those old clothes of mine, feelin' like the shanty-boater I was. Yes, suh. I don't s'pose theh's any more miserable feelin' in this world 'an I had, seein' those men around May, an' how she laughed, her cheeks coloring up. Lawse! Lawse! How mighty triffin' a man is, if he ain't much 'count out in the world!

They was one feller there, he come from the op'ry 'house, an awful swell, dressed right up to the handle. He took May off, by herself, an' she called me in, too. I wondered about that, but seems he wanted her to come up an' dance on his stage, too. Palura he cussed and squabbled around about it, argying. 'Fore we knowed it we had quite a job, May an' me did, teaming it.

We walked down Ferry Street to our boats, which we'd left with Jim Horseshoe, at the landing. She come on board my boat, to warm, for the night was fresh, walking down. She danced; in the cold it chilled her; I hated to think of her going out into that chilly rag shack over her skiff.

"Yo'll catch cold!" I told her. "All het up, thisaway!"

She looked at me, first into one eye, then into the otheh, with both her eyes. By an' by she laughed a low, funny little chuckle.

"You dear boy!" she said, jes' like that. "Just to please you—I'll take your bed to-night!"

So I went out into her skiff, mighty glad she'd have that comfy cabin to sleep in. In the morning she put her arms around my neck, when I came in, looking at me, smiling, sorry.

"Am I mean, making you sleep out there in the cold?"

That night we played, regular in the the-

ater. May caught the crowd. They throwed bouquets at her, an' we was called the "River Number," just like that. Her dancing to my music was "wonderful entertainment," they said in the newspapers. In a month we'd saved about six hundred dollars.

I wasn't happy any more. If I'd come off down the rivers, account of my being just a fiddler, and the girl I thought so much of back there shook me for a fellow making twenty dollars a week—she hadn't any voice, she couldn't dance, an' wan't nothing but pretty—now I was ready to go back up the bank. The way folks crowded around May, coming back, to see her—and to ask me about her, men an' women!

Oh, I knowed I loved her! One woman come to me, a swell looking woman, wearin' jewels an' clothes all shimmering and perfume. She told me my music was perfectly wonderful—taffy like that. I knowed what she was driving at. It wan't no time than she was asking about May.

"Your wife's a wonderful dancer!" she told me. "How your music does inspire her! It is the most inspiring music I ever heard!"

"My wife?" I looked at her. "Why, lady, that girl wouldn't marry me. I'm jes' a fiddlin' shanty-boater. She's a stepper."

"Not married!" this woman exclaimed. "But—but—oh—yes! I've heard on the river—I suppose she wouldn't—How honorable of you to put it that way!"

She sniffed—at May! Course, I hadn't thought anything before. We were jes' two professional people. There wasn't any real violinist May could find, no real musician, so she'd put up with me. Lots of geniuses is thataway, putting up and getting along with what they have, not complaining or anything.

"Who's that woman you were talking to?" May asked me afterward.

"Why, I don't know—one of those up-town women—"

"Oh—was it?"

I knowed right away that May knew I'd blundered, saying something. I hadn't thought anything. Imagine me thinking anything about May! She was awful quiet, along. There was a tall, handsome

man come to her, with flowers, saying it, as they tell around. I sure despised that up-the-banker. He wan't fitting for May. The bestest man in the world wasn't fit for her. He come to me once. He wanted to know if May wasn't my wife? I told him, the same as I would anybody, how it was. We were only professional people.

Those were mighty lonesome days for me. Seemed just like May an' me was being tore apart, stretching the aching strings of my heart. Course, I jes' knowed hit didn't matter to her. She was thinkin' about her dancing. She was busy having new clothes made and was studying the new life that was opening up to her.

"Lucien!" she told me one day, down on the boat. "Just think—the world wants us!"

"Us!" I laughed, but it hurt. "Hit's you!"

She gave me one of those quick, birdlike looks as though I was plumb ridiculous. I knowed I was, too, or she wouldn't be making fun of me, as if I was much more'n jes' somebody to mark time for her. She could dance to "Patting Juba," making it sound like the "River Voices" when old Joe Parmer plays hit.

I had some jobs fiddling at private houses; ten, twenty, fifty dollars they'd pay me. They paid May five hundred dollars one night to dance at a business men's dinner, on the table. She came down to the boat crying mad. I don't know what happened. She scolded me, rearing right down on me.

"Don't you know what I want?" she told me. "Don't you see what they think? Oh, you poor idiot—have I *got* to say it?"

"Say what?" I asked; an' then she reared at me. She'd been awful patient with me, one time and another. I couldn't always he'p showin' her what I thought, even if it was insulting for me to love her. I just couldn't bring myse'f to ask her to marry me, account of when you do that to a girl she's always sorry for you, an' she promises to be your sister an' don't know you the next time you meet her.

If I asked her to marry me, course, she'd cut loose, prob'ly go uptown, an' all that'd be left for me would be to trip off down

the river, with just her picture on my heart, a picture burned in deep, beautiful, but a scar as big as a Texas brand. I didn't feel like I could ever stand a hurt like that—the hurt of losing her, never seein' May again, not her dancing, nor her eyes brimming with laughter and sympathy—and her lips that smiled free for me, until she begun to dance, and we needn't to wonder if we'd have enough for breakfast the next morning to eat.

That woman I was telling about come down to the ferry in her automobile one day. May'd gone uptown, so she asked Jim Horseshoe to come up the bayou to bring me down. I come down, course, so she took me with her account of May not being there, she said, my music being good, if there wasn't anybody to dance but her.

She was an awful high-toned woman, an' you know she wanted to dance herself, trying the riveh music. So I played for her. Course, if you dance riveh music, you got to know the riveh—know the rocking of the boat in the eddies an' the swing of the current. But this Alice Haven was quite a stepper at that. She said my music just carried her right along. She danced bold, though, not the way May did. Course, she was a good flinger an' had a little kick to her that was graceful—but she didn't have to be professional. She was rich. And when she was tired, she come and laid her head on my shoulder for a breathing spell. That kind of thing neveh made any man feel bad, course. But the way May acted when this Alice Haven brought me back in her car like a cabin boat!

"She's trying to break up our combination!" May said, talking more spiteful than I ever did get to hear her talk before.

I was s'prised. I'd been worrying my heart out, fearin' May'd see how no 'count I was to her, an' be shut of me like I was an old hat. When she talked thataway, lettin' on she feared we'd break up, my heart jes' grew so big it hurt, like it would burst. May didn't want to lose me! She was so mad at the thought, she lashed me with her tongue, stinging, biting, slighting, scolding words. But, shucks! Theh's no joy so sweet as the raw wounds a woman gives a man, account of her being jealous.

My law! May Gardner slashed and cut me! Don't yo' b'lieve she didn't scorch an' bruise me, an' I was down on my knees at her feet beggin' her mercy an' pity, but my soul rang to sweeter music in the scorn an' fire of her anger than ev'eh hit had echoed before. May Gardner jealous of me! May Gardner tearin' to pieces the good looks an' reputation of that up-the-bank Alice Haven—account of me!

"That woman dancin' to my music!" May scorched me, her face twisting an' her eyes squinting mad. "You fiddlin' for *her* to dance! That woman!"

I expect some men is so sure an' pop'lar that it don't mean nothin' to them when a woman's jealous on their account. Prob'ly up-the-bankers, swell folks, neveh know what hit is to find out a lady likes them so much she hates anybody else that's friendly.

I come down on the riveh account of a woman's laugh at my playing music, the best I could do, for her—when she'd been listening to jingling dollars in another man's pocket. Funny, ain't it, how things work out? I've been making more money in a day 'n that feller she jilted me for has ev'eh made in a week.

I was at May's feet. I kissed those pretty silk stockings, between the straps of her slippers. I cried, tears coming down my cheeks—but not on account of being sorry, no indeed! I was happy! I was so blamed happy I dassent to show her my face, for fear I would betray the joy I was enduring.

An' I took her hands in mine. I kissed them, grateful as a dog for the friendly pat of his mistress. I'd neveh in God's world deserve any happiness that dancing girl had given me; the rewards of heaven couldn't have tempted me away from what it dawned on me was coming to be mine—account of her being jealous of that up-the-bank woman!

Course, d'rectly I was standing up. I was standing in the cabin of my shanty-boat, on the floor where Steppin' May'd been practicing. An' she was right theh, with my arms around her, an' her face turned up to me.

"May," I said, "yo' don't mean—yo' don't want me to ask yo' to marry yo', do you?"

"Don't I?" she asked, awful sarcastic. "What do I want, then?"

I couldn't believe it, even then, an' her in my arms, all limp—to have for my own, to kiss those lips, to claim those eyes! Lawse! Lawse! Fiddling Luce come to this, down old Mississipp'!

Hit warn't jes' professional people. Hit warn't jes' me fiddlin' for her practice steppin', come the time when she'd have somebody that 'd be able to play.

Hit were me loving that lovely woman, with her arms around my neck, and my lips worshiping temple lips, looking into the gem-light windows of her soul. Yes, suh! How come hit that woman let on she loved me? How could she—that woman, like a statue alive?

I married her. We cut loose from Mendova, trippin' down. When night come, I couldn't believe hit were so, that she wouldn't, an' I wouldn't either, go out into that skiff alongside, to sleep under the tarpaulin—but this was our cabin, our room, and she'd sit on my lap. Sho! Sho!

Yes, suh! Lots drap down old Mississipp', an' the farther down they go, the more miserable they are. They'd better quit, 'fore they roll out at the Passes. But some—some that hear the music, some that see the flash and spread of the colors, some that listen to the birds and feel the soothing in the sting of the north wind, an' smell the fragrance of the blossoms in the dank of the swamp brakes—they'd sure better keep on trippin' down; yes, indeedy!

I tell yo', if a man can keep step to the song old Mississipp' sings, he better not break with it. He'll march into the halls of plumb comfort, if he marks the time, yes, suh. That's my experience. 'Tain't everybody's, but hit's mine. An' May, she says it's her experience, too. We've been far together, New York an' the Coast—Sho! No matter if we's busy—ev'ry wunst in a while we stop off on old Mississipp', buy a shanty-boat an' trip down. That's what we're doing now. But we don't neveh stop to Mendova any more. May won't let me.

"I ain't going to have that woman—any other woman—steppin' to your music!"

Just like that, and then we both laugh.



The Light in the Cabin

By **HAROLD FREEMAN MINERS**

STEVE RORK possessed plenty of animal courage. Had he not he never would have earned the sanguine title of "The Killer." And certainly he well deserved that grisly sobriquet, for in all the annals of crime in the West there had never existed the perpetration of a more ruthless, cold blooded series of killings.

But now, for once, his nerve was shaken. It is no sinecure to be adrift, lost and afoot, in the worst blizzard of a quarter century.

He struggled unsteadily to his feet and with a shaking hand wiped the blood from his right eye where it had trickled down from the cut on his forehead. For a moment the warm liquid brought a tremor of fear. There is something terrifying in blood, particularly when it is your own.

The wet, clinging snow swirled about him in blinding eddies, thick, bewildering. He was half conscious that the air had grown more penetrating; that the snow was becoming drier; that the cold was clamping

down. Just now life was possible. As the cold increased in intensity it would become less tenable until that point when mercury would seek the bulb. Then, to be lost in the driving flakes would be as sure death as to face a firing squad.

Again Rork shivered.

But there was animal courage there aplenty and animal instinct urged him on. Any animal will fight to the last breath for self preservation.

Rork brushed the blood and snow from his eyes impatiently. The wound was nothing. The storm was nothing. Steve Rork was no weakling to succumb or even be frightened by such trifles. Steve Rork, feared of men, deserving the title of "The Killer" a dozen fold, was no stripling to be conquered and vanquished by the elements. Resolutely he plunged into the storm.

Reason told Rork to go down the gulch, for in that direction lay civilization and

possible safety. Instinct told him to go upward and drift before the storm. He followed instinct.

For one thing his horse was gone and he knew that his strength would last far longer by taking advantage of the force of the blizzard than it would in bucking its buffeting fury. For another the old instinct to evade justice, to cheat the law of its goal, still persisted in spite of the hazard of personal safety. So he turned his face away from the driving snow.

But even as he stumbled and batted his way upward through the ever increasing storm fear again smote his consciousness. Possibly it was because he knew that death dogged his every footstep. Possibly it was more intimately connected with that last killing when he had snuffed out the life of Adam Borchers.

That killing troubled Rork. It had rankled in his mind all during the long ride through the blizzard before he had lost his horse as he fled from the vengeance of the law. Rork had always prided himself on that iron nerve and implacable brutality which had enabled him to meet his victims and shoot them down face to face. He had even laughed as he did it.

And now for the first time he departed from that rule and shot a man in the back. Adam Borchers had never had a chance. Without warning the heavy bullet had caught him and whipped out his life like a candle flame in a gale.

That troubled Rork, troubled him more than he cared to admit.

Possibly because he had violated the unwritten code of gunmen. Possibly by reason of the superstition that is more or less prominent in every primitive mind. He wished he hadn't done it. And the wish was father to an ineffable fear that was but accentuated by the wrath of the storm.

For a half hour he labored through the piling drifts and as the minutes passed he realized that the blizzard was taking heavy toll of his prodigal strength. The snow banks fettered his legs and drained the power of his huge muscles. The wind buffeted him as though he were dandelion down and sucked his breath. The cold with inexorable relentlessness snapped his

energy. He sensed that the end could not be far off.

And then suddenly, like a beacon at sea, a light shone through the storm. Flickering, twinkling, flashing intermittently through the gusts of snow, there it was, straight ahead, a light where no light should be—a promise of refuge where no refuge existed.

For several minutes Rork could not believe his eyes. The thing was not possible. No one lived this high up in the hills. No cabin stood anywhere in this locality. Hadn't he chosen this route for that very reason? And yet there could be no denying that the light shone forth from a cabin window.

Suddenly Steve Rork remembered. Crazy Preacher Job! He had heard about the eccentric old man who went about the country preaching the gospel to all who would listen and plastering every available building, fence and rock with biblical quotations. He had even seen some of these queer signs himself—stern exhortations to repent and be saved boldly emblazoned with white paint on some conspicuous boulder. People said that the old preacher was crazy, had been so firm in their convictions as to affix the word to his name.

Rork remembered now that some one had told him that the old man maintained a cabin somewhere in this vicinity to which he returned from his wanderings at times to pray and meditate in solitude on the sins of the world. Rork concluded that this must be the place and the old man must be at home.

Well, any port in a storm. Rork had no liking for sanctimonious "sky-pilots," hated the whole tribe in fact, but the cabin offered shelter and warmth with the possibility of food—and he was freezing to death. It was no time to quibble.

Suddenly Rork chuckled. The absurd humor of the situation had just percolated his slow thinking brain. He, the Killer, was going to call on Crazy Preacher Job! That self-styled old "savior of the hills," would have to be, unwillingly, the means of saving the life of the most notorious killer of a decade. More than that by saving his life the old preacher would actually be

assisting him to escape the law, to cheat it as he had done so many times before.

To Rork's warped sense of humor it was a rare bit of irony. He chuckled again and then he laughed aloud.

Crazy Preacher Job saving the Killer! Haw! He, Rork, would have a good bit of fun out of it, too. And if the old man got funny he'd just hand him a few doses of hot lead before he left.

With renewed energy Rork kicked his way through the drifts to the cabin. With a hamlike fist he thundered a summons on the door.

"Hey, old man, open up an' do it dam' quick," he bawled above the storm.

He waited for an answering hail from within the cabin. None came. Nor any sound that denoted the presence of a human being.

Steve Rork was not one to stand on ceremony. Fumbling in the darkness he found the latch and lifted it. A mighty blast of wind tore the door from his grasp, whipped it open with a crash and flung him headlong into the room. Only by a superhuman effort was he able to swing the heavy planks on their hinges. Exercising every ounce of his brute strength he forced the portal slowly against the gale and shot the bolt.

And then he turned.

In his varied career Steve Rork had been in many strange places. Some of them passing strange. But never had he seen anything so strikingly grotesque as this long room in which he now found himself.

From the farther end a leaping log fire threw a weird, flickering light over the rough walls, lighting up now this corner, now that. The cabin itself was better built than is usual, the logs having been painstakingly hewn square and laid flat together. It was this rough hewn surface that presented such a bizzare appearance.

The entire interior of the cabin, including even rafters and roof boards, was covered with a hodge-podge of queer lettering—biblical quotations and allusions of every conceivable sort. Emblazoned on the dark walls in letters of shining white they marched up and down and across in bold relief. Nor did they stop at the walls, but

reaching out they encompassed the very rafters and straggled across the roof boards at every possible angle.

There was neither rime or rhythm in the arrangement of this crude lettering. One burning exhortation might preserve some semblance of the horizontal while the next would start out at an impossible angle and end in a flourishing reverse curve. Only one rule was observed—every single square inch had been utilized; no available space was without its righteous command.

There seemed to be no continuity or plan to this wholesale signboard of the gospel. "Jesus Saves" marched alongside "Hell Calls." "Love Thy Neighbor As Thyself" held close communion with "The Times Be Evil." In a far corner "God Is Love" jostled at an acute angle with "Vengeance Is Mine."

Perhaps the space over the fireplace presented the most striking appearance. In huge letters more than a foot in height the two words "Jesus Saves," had been crudely worked out by nailing short sections of tree branches to the logs. In each case the "S" was reversed. Painted white and opposing each other at ludicrous angles these jagged letters caught and held a sententious maxim that instead of being hopeful and calm in its sentiment seemed in its harsh surroundings to be grim and foreboding. As if to accentuate this impression directly beneath the rustic motto on the wide stone mantel three grinning skulls in a row held silent watch over the ghostly flames.

Steve Rork was too insensible to the ordinary gravities of life to be easily affected, but this fantastic scene produced a tumult that still further unsteadied his already shaking nerves. In his entire make-up there was not a whit of religion or respect for the cloth, yet now he experienced a sense of dread that was inexplicable but none the less potent.

This increased as his eyes swiftly swept the room. When they encountered the crude motto above the mantel and then came to rest on the grinning skulls he shuddered.

Then for the first time he became aware of another person present. A man stood in the doorway to the right of the fireplace,

a doorway obviously leading to a rear room. Tall, lean, spare, yet broad in his spareness, he filled the portal from threshold to rough hewn lintel—and such a man!

Rork professed contempt for all “sky-pilots,” yet he was awed in the presence of this particular individual. Shabbily dressed, it was true, yet there was about the man a calm, stern dignity wholly indifferent to raiment or surroundings, Straight as a ramrod he stood in the doorway, his arms hung loose, his shoulders squared with a carriage that spoke fearlessness toward man and the world.

A spare, aquiline face, full bearded gave him an air of power and impregnability hard to delineate but easy of comprehension. His hair was raven black, like his beard, except here and there where it was streaked with gray.

But it was the man's eyes that focused attention. Black as jet, they seemed to fairly burn from their deep stockets with ebony flames—twin holocausts of indictment that sought out and searched a man's very soul. Steve Rork found it hard to meet their piercing gaze. There was something about the tall, gaunt figure almost terrifying.

But Rork had too much brute courage to be long intimidated now that he was safe from the wrath of the storm. After gazing at the old preacher for a moment in inquiring silence he suddenly bellowed out like a mad bull.

“Why in hell don't yuh let a man in when he knocks? Think I want to stand out there an' freeze, you ol' fool?”

With an imperious gesture the preacher raised his right hand. His voice boomed out with a hollowness that carried full above the clamor of the storm.

“Peace, man, peace! Thee had no need to knock. My door stands open to all who care to enter.”

To most men such a statement would have been disarming. The Killer was merely nonplused. He could find no ready retort—at least no retort sufficiently venomous to satisfy him. And, like other men of his type, unable to find words apt in their causticity, he took refuge in brute wrath.

“You lie!” he snarled.

“Peace, Steve Rork. Come not in wrath into the house of God.”

“So you know me, eh?” questioned the Killer with a wicked glint in his deep-set, piggish eyes.

“Know thee? Who in all this country does not know thee to his sorrow, murderer of men?”

For a moment Steve Rork was tempted to whip out his gun and add one more to his long list of victims. Ordinarily, had any man used such words and tone to him he would have ended that man's earthly career then and there—out of sheer bravado, if for nothing else—but now something held him back, something which he could not define. He told himself that it was because he wanted to toy with the old preacher, to see him grovel in fear like a whipped dog, before his life was snuffed out. But it was not this that stayed his hand. It was something deeper, something more gripping, something that he could not define, but which held a power stronger than his to resist.

“Careful, old man,” he rasped. “I've sent men to hell fer sayin' less 'n' that.”

The old preacher's eyes suddenly seemed to blaze anew and his voice boomed out with a sepulchral quality that was scarce human.

“Your threats are naught,” Steve Rork. “I fear thee not. Thee cannot harm me. My soul is safe in the hands of God.”

Had the Killer heard these words uttered at a religious gathering, he would have guffawed his derision in a bellowing voice. Now, in this strange setting, alone in the queer cabin with the eccentric old preacher, far hid in the hills, with the storm wailing in banshee fury outside, he was suddenly awed by their solemn import. They struck a chord in his brute sensibilities before undiscovered.

A nameless dread again clutched at him. And, like all men confused and balked, he took refuge in bluster.

“Don't spring any of that sky-pilot bunk on me, old man,” he scoffed sneeringly. “It don't go down—see?”

“Take not the name of the Lord in vain,” the old man's voice boomed out again, “for

he who blasphemes the Lord shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; and thee, Steve Rork, killer of men, have need to fear the wrath of God. Thy hands are red with blood, and already the gates of heaven are closing to thee. Repent, man, repent! Bring thy soul in sackcloth and ashes to the throne of God. It is even now not too late."

It has been said that even a self-confessed infidel deep down in his heart believes in a supreme being. Certain it is that most men who publicly scoff at the professions of the churchgoing secretly entertain a fear of death and Deity. Steve Rork was one of these. Before he had never had cause to admit it, even to himself. Now the thundering words of the old preacher beat upon his storm confused senses with strange force.

"Stop it! Stop it!" His voice rose in a shrieking crescendo above the detonations of the storm. "I didn't come here to be preached at. I don't want any o' yer damned religious bunk. I want grub—an' I want it damn quick, old man."

"Food and drink thee shall have," answered the old man mildly—"food and drink for the body. That I will give thee gladly—and more, too. Food for the soul as well—for that thee needs most of all, Steve Rork—and that it is my right and duty to give thee."

"Yuh'll give me what I want—an' nothin' else—or I'll blow yer damn head off yer shoulders!" snarled the Killer. "I've a mind to do it anyway fer spoutin' yer rotten church stuff at me."

The old preacher had turned toward the doorway. Now, at Rork's words, he turned and his eyes blazed again. Involuntarily the Killer fell back a step as the old man advanced into the room.

"I have told thee to come not into the house of God in wrath, Steve Rork. Thy threats are in vain. I have no fear of thee. I repeat—my soul is safe in the hands of God."

Suddenly the old preacher turned and his long arm swept out in a wild gesture toward the mantel with its gruesome sentinels.

"There, Steve Rork," he thundered, "is

all that remains earthly of three who came to me in wrath—came to me with greed and lust and murder in their foul hearts, just as thee has come—and I slew them to save their immortal souls.

"Beware, oh, killer of men, that thou come not to the same end, for thee has sinned grievously and the end of thy trail is near. God hath delivered thee into mine hands, and 'vengeance is mine,' saith the Lord. Justice *must* be satisfied. 'An eye for an eye,' saith the Lord. Thee must pay to the last farthing, even as these have paid."

With another sudden motion the old man crossed to the mantel and raised one of the skulls from its place. Standing moodily in front of the dancing flames, his head bowed, the skull held contemplatively between his hands, he was like another *Hamlet*—but a *Hamlet* more grim, morose, terrible than that other conceived so long ago. There was something about him of fatality, of inexorable doom.

Fascinated by something stronger than curiosity, the Killer made no move. He was suddenly possessed by an insane desire to whip out his gun and pump its contents into the old man's body. He knew that he would do it in the end, but now he watched, bewitched by the very ghastliness of the scene. His scalp suddenly prickled. When the other lifted the skull from the mantel he shuddered.

As for Preacher Job, he seemed for the moment to have become oblivious to the presence of his visitor. Lost in moody, sorrowful contemplation, he stood in silence for several moments. When he did begin to speak, it was as though to himself—a soliloquy of sadness. His voice was low, but its hollowness so resonant that Steve Rork caught each word distinctly, even when the storm rent the air with redoubled fury.

"Thou, John Moreland—thou wert my best friend. Trusted, true, tried in a hundred fires of loyalty. Friend of my boyhood; companion of my manhood. I would have trusted thee through fire and water. And yet there came a day when lust entered thy heart—lust black as the fires of hell. Thee coveted my wife. Thee sought

to take from me my dearest, my loveliest possession. Thee did. And so I slew thee—slew thee to save thy soul. It were better so, John—better so."

Carefully, sorrowfully he returned the skull to its place on the mantel. Then he as carefully took down the second. Now his voice suddenly became harsh.

"And thou, Angus MacDonald—thou! Spawn of hell, thou proved to be! Thee did I befriend. Thee did I feed. Thee did I give of my goods when thou wert in want. Thee did I succor in sickness. And how didst thou repay me? When God in His goodness led me to gold in the hills, thou came in the dead of night with greed and murder in thy heart. Thee sought to kill me, to take my gold, thou son of hell! And so I slew thee—slew thee with my bare hands—to save thy soul. It is well thou didst live no longer, Angus MacDonald."

Spellbound, frozen in horror, the Killer watched and listened. As the old preacher replaced the second skull and took down the third, a high, shrill wail whipped at the corners of the cabin. Steve Rork fell back a step or two, his face blanched. But the old man did not seem to notice. He was lost in contemplation, and now his rigid, square shoulders seemed to have slumped a little, to have lost some of their dauntlessness. His face seemed suddenly haggard. His voice was tired.

"And thou, Paul—mine own; thou, my son—mine only begotten son. Thee did I cherish above all. Thee did I instruct in the ways of the Holy One. Thee did I watch over and pray for and guide. But it was of no avail. Thy heart was bad—rotten to the very core. Wine, women and gambling—every sin of a sinful world. Lower and lower didst thou sink into the sloughs of hell, down until thy very soul was buried in the slime. And because there was no other way to save thee, I slew thee—slew thee, my only begotten son—slew thee to save thy soul. Forgive me, Paul—forgive me—but it was the only way."

And then, like some wild beast of the field, he suddenly turned on the Killer. His long arm flung out wildly and a bony forefinger pointed accusingly at Rork.

"And thee, Steve Rork, thy time has

come. Thee hast broken every law of God and man and thy time to pay has arrived. God hast delivered thee into mine hands, and like these others thou must pay the penalty. But enough of this. I have many things to say to thee, but first we must eat, for thou art hungered."

Without waiting for a reply, the old preacher set about the preparation of a meal. From the wall he drew a small table toward the center of the floor. From the back room he brought dishes and presently steaming food. It was evident that he had been engaged in cooking his evening meal when Rork arrived.

The Killer watched him with mingled emotions. In all his polychrome career he had never been shaken as he had in this short experience. The setting was so weird, so little short of ghostly, that it had struck chords in his nature of which he had been to this time entirely unconscious, and their discovery was far from pleasing. His mind was confused. In fact, it contained but one coherent thought—that he intended to kill the eccentric old preacher, and that before long. But he would eat first.

"Come, draw up thy chair," invited the old man as he brought forth a steaming pot of coffee. "Let us eat."

Rork drew up a chair and placed it across the table from Preacher Job. He sat down with a swagger of arrogance. Once more he was the domineering tyrant with another to do his bidding. And he was chuckling inwardly at the trick he was going to play on the old man when they had finished their meal. Pretty good, that—to let him have a full belly to die on.

And then for the first time he noticed that the table, instead of being laid for two, was set for three.

Rork gazed at the third plate curiously for a moment, and then, jerking an admonitory thumb toward it, he looked across at Preacher Job and asked crustily:

"Who's the third plate fer, old man?"

For a long moment the old expounder of the Gospel did not answer. He sat motionless, eying Rork steadily. The black flames from his deep-set eyes seemed to pierce the Killer to the very marrow. It was only by the utmost exertion of his will

power that he was able to meet that wild stare.

Suddenly the old man's voice boomed out, hollow and strident:

"Sir, death feasts with us to-night!"

Rork felt his scalp prickle; first scattering, then as though it was suddenly cold, chilled. He experienced a peculiar sinking sensation at the pit of his stomach; his mouth was dry.

Was it possible that he, the Killer, was afraid of this harmless old creature? Was superstition breaking his nerve—he, the slayer of a dozen men?

He tried to speak, to hurl some vile epithet at the old preacher; but the words would not come. They stuck in his throat, unuttered, silenced by some strange power he could not resist.

His right hand sought his gun butt—and then withdrew. Much as he wanted to, he could not draw the gun and shoot. Without taking further notice of him, Preacher Job started to eat, and after a moment or two Rork followed suit.

The meal was consumed in silence. The Killer ate nervously, glancing furtively from time to time across the table at his strange host. Each time he seemed to meet the old man's piercing gaze—and each time he looked away unable to encounter the ebon flames of those eyes.

Outside the storm continued to beat against the cabin in unabated fury.

Rork finished first, but the old preacher continued to eat his fill in maddening deliberation. He seemed lost in contemplation.

Finally he pushed his chair back from the table and stared fixedly across at the Killer. Rork thought he was never going to break the silence. When he did it was in a ringing voice, with a wild gesture of the arm.

"Now, Steve Rork, I have things to say to thee. The day of judgment has arrived, and thou must pay—even to the last farthing."

Then, his blazing eyes fixed on Rork, the old man began to expound the Gospel—expound it in ringing tones and biting words. And strangely enough, the Killer listened—listened in spite of an overpower-

ing desire to pump his accuser full of lead and then flee into the storm away from this accursed place.

In bitter words the old preacher drew from his biblical store a scathing arraignment of Rork's crimes. He heaped religious anathema upon religious anathema. He castigated the Killer in phrases that cut and burned like hot iron. He heaped Gospel invective upon Gospel invective until he had made out a case against the man before him that reeked with every vile crime in the calendar.

And then slowly, with a precision and logic surprising in one of his meager education, he drew from that same biblical store an indictment that would have been superb in any court of justice—a judgment unenforceable, but none the less fearful. And the Killer listened, silently, sullenly, but with a constantly rising gorge of anger. Suddenly the old man leaped to his feet and, pointing a bony forefinger at Rork, delivered his sentence:

"Steve Rork, to-night God hast delivered thee into mine hands. Tonight you go to Red Cliff and give yourself up to the law!"

Even as the old man rose to his feet the Killer did likewise, and, without taking his eyes from his accuser, he slowly backed away from the table and down the room until the two men were separated by a dozen feet or more.

"I guess you got another think comin', old man," he snarled. A nervous twitch to his lips gave his forbidding countenance a bestial aspect.

The preacher turned, without lowering his arm, and again his voice boomed above the storm:

"I repeat, Steve Rork—to-night you give yourself up to the law!"

These last words seemed abruptly to end the spell that bound the Killer. His lips parted in a hard, fixed grin. His hand darted to his gun butt. The little cabin was suddenly filled with the thunder of a report.

Rork saw the splinters fly from a log in back of Preacher Job as the heavy lead slug bit deep into the wood. He expected to see the old man crumple up on the floor.

Instead he was amazed to find the indomitable old preacher standing as immobile as a rock, his right hand still outflung accusingly, and even as the echoes of the gun died his voice boomed out again:

"'Vengeance is mine,' saith the Lord.

Again Rork pulled the trigger. Again the heavy bullet threw splinters from the log wall. Still the old man did not fall. And again, as though his voice thundered back the echo of the exploding gun, came the words:

"'To the last farthing—to the last farthing.'"

The Killer was in a frenzied panic now. His face was ashen, and his lips had set into a grotesque grimace of cravenness. His hands twitched and shook. It was only by a superhuman effort that he was again able to steady his gun and fire.

Even as he pulled the trigger, a high, shrill wail mounted to a summit of acuteness, as though the storm in its fury was shrieking its defiance at his puny efforts—and then as quickly as the cry rose, it fell—fell to a dead silence that was ghostly in its completeness. Every breath of the elements was stilled. Only the old man's voice was heard, low, clear, humble:

"Safe in the hands of God."

And then, lower yet, a mere whisper that in its very meekness beat on Steve Rork's eardrums like thunder:

"Safe in the hands of God."

The Killer's courage had mounted in a frenzy of excitement, a high pitch of emotion. Now it collapsed as suddenly. For a moment he looked at the old preacher standing there in serene self-possession. Then his fingers loosened spasmodically and the heavy gun clattered to the floor. In that instant he broke completely. The iron nerve that had carried him through a hundred tight places suddenly failed; and he was afraid—horribly, cravenly, tremblingly afraid.

His hands went to his eyes in a gesture of bewilderment, as though he would shut out the world from his consciousness, and then his knees slowly gave way and he sank to the floor with a hoarse whimpering cry, more beast than human.

Steve Rork was broken, crushed. He

lay face downward, his body racked by great dry sobs.

For several moments the old preacher regarded him in stern compassion before he stepped forward and picked up the gun. His voice lost its harshness when he spoke, but it was none the less stern, determined.

"Come, Steve Rork, let us be on our way," he commanded. "To-night thou must give thyself up to the law."

Rork half raised himself from the floor and his terror-stricken eyes noted the gun in the old man's hands.

"My Gawd, man, not to-night!" he cried. "Not in this storm! No, no! Gawd, man, we'd be lost in ten minutes! We'd die!"

"God will guide the way," stated the old preacher simply.

II.

STEVE RORK never knew how he made that fifteen miles to Red Cliff. Afterward he could not remember. He only knew that it was terrible.

The storm buffeted him cruelly. It tore at his body in maniacal fury and sucked the very breath from his lips. The snow sifted through his clothes and the cold took icy hold of his limbs. The drifts grasped and clutched at his legs, more than once baffled him completely.

Again and again he stumbled, fell, struggled unsteadily to his feet, only to stumble, fall, bury himself in the drifts again. More than once he would have given up, allowed the storm to have its way, but always that sepulchral voice boomed out of the storm, driving him on and on. It was like the knell of doom in his wake, and he fled away from it only to have it follow on, to dog his footsteps hour after hour.

It was well toward morning when Rork stumbled into the jail at Red Cliff more dead than alive. His senses were benumbed. He could no longer think. He only wanted warmth—life-giving, sleepy warmth—and to be free from that terrible voice in the storm.

Rork had always boasted that he would never be taken alive. Now as Sheriff John Stark swung the cell door and made it fast he could not resist the temptation to gloat.

"Said we'd never get you alive, didn't you, Steve?" he gibed. "Well, we've got you this time. You'll swing all right."

The Killer turned on him in a fury.

"Yuh'd 'a' never got me if it hadn't been fer that damned crazy preacher!" he cried.

"How's that, Steve? What 'd he do?" asked the sheriff.

And the Killer told him. In a halting, sobbing voice he went over the events of the night, describing each incident from the moment he had plunged headlong from his horse to the time he stumbled half frozen into the jail. He left out nothing. Sometimes his voice rose to a wild, high, half insane pitch.

Sheriff John Stark listened quietly and with mounting interest. When Rork finished he made no comment, but turned away with a puzzled look on his keen old face. Back in his office he propped his feet on his desk, drew a black cigar from his pocket, lit it, and with long, contemplative puffs lost himself in the consideration of a problem far too intricate for him to solve.

III.

It was well after daybreak when Sam Reynolds, one of Stark's deputies, opened the office door and came in out of the cold with a great stamping of feet and blowing of fingers.

"Some night, wasn't it, Sam?" greeted the sheriff.

"Some night?" Reynolds questioned vo-

ciferously in reply. "Man, she shore was some helldinger!"

"Yes, you're right, Sam, I reckon," Stark stated enigmatically. "Some night in more ways than one. We've got the Killer locked up, Sam."

Reynolds's eyes bulged wide in astonishment.

"The Killer! My Gawd! How'd you git him, sheriff?"

"Didn't git him, Sam. He came in and gave himself up."

"Give himself up? You're kiddin' me, sheriff! The Killer never did that? And in that hellish storm?"

"Sounds funny, I know, Sam," answered the sheriff, "but that's just what he did. Only maybe he really didn't do just that, either. He claims that old crazy Preacher Job drove him in at the point of his own gun. Right queer, Sam."

"Maybe that ain't so queer as it might be, sheriff," Sam Reynolds replied. "I reckon that old cuss is right capable o' doin' it if he took it into his crazy old head."

"'Fraid it's mighty queer, anyway, Sam. You see, the Killer claims that the old preacher took his gun away from him and then drove him in here with it. What's so queer about it is that when Rork give himself up his gun was still in the holster on his hip. That's it on my desk. But maybe what's queerest of all is that old crazy Preacher Job has been dead for three weeks."



BRIDGE

I STOPPED on the bridge at midnight

And said to the lady who'd won—

I said it because I was right,

I said it with keen delight,

I said it for money was tight—

I said to the lady who'd won:

"You are a son-of-a-gun!"

And the lady who had won,

Who had jabbed me with her gaff,

Did she hand me back my money?

Wow!

She handed me the laugh!

W. J. Lampton.



A Rodeo Romeo

By JACK CASEY

"SLIM" WATSON dismounted from a flea-bitten pony before the Sunset Slope general store and post office. "Hear the news?"

Jim Larkin spoke. Big Jim of the Lazy U outfit back in the Big Four Bend. About him lounged half dozen riders of the herd, all eying the big cowboy as he challenged Slim in a bass voice which seemed to surge from fathomless depths.

"What news?" Slim yanked a hitch in the pony's leather and abruptly wheeled about.

Larkin said: "Tex Allen's in town looking for riders to go to New York. 'S going to put on a rodeo. He's up at Markins' right now."

"Huh." Slim shuffled toward the group, then relaxed into a slouch, with one big hand resting against a porch support. "Yuh goin'?"

Larkin shook his head. "Can't."

"Why?"

"Too busy at the ranch. 'N' anyway I don't think I'd like ridin' in Noo Yawk."

"No different than ridin' here," drawled Slim.

"No-o-o, I suppose not, but, well," Larkin laughed, "it'd seem different if yuh got throwed an' a lot o' smart guys laughed at yuh."

"Don't get throwed," was Slim's philosophical retort.

"That's all right for you to say," spoke up Red Reardon, "with those bean pole legs of yours. Yuh ain't never got your feet offen the ground when you ride so you can't be thrown. If you'd put prunin' hooks on those trailin' arbutuses you call laigs, you could hire out on an 'outlaw' and plow up a ten acre garden patch every hour."

"They are a bit long," admitted Slim, gazing down at the props in question. "But yuh know the old sayin', a lean hoss for a long race."

"Depends on the kind of a race," interrupted Larkin. "I know little short guys like Tex Allen what might run a big guy ragged in a race for a lady."

"Yeh, Tex is short," granted Slim.

"I'll say he is," said Larkin, "but that don't slack his speed none with the ladies. Right now he's with a lady a certain long-legged hombre not far from here ain't been hatin' none for the last year."

"They was playin' checkers when I come by," spoke up Tiny Blodgett bestirring his two hundred and fifty pounds of bulk. "I could see right in the porch window."

"Checkers?" said Slim. "Huh, guess it's my move."

He ambled back to his horse and loosened the hitch.

"Cheerio," called the gang.

"Cheerio," replied Slim.

A moment later he was galloping toward the Markins' bungalow. In it resided the family of May Markins, who in three months had said "No" forty-nine times to proposals from Slim Watson, whose parents had taken shameful advantage of him twenty-four years before by christening him "Cæsar," with the middle name of "Augustus."

Slim approached the Markins' place from the rear. He walked his horse through a back yard pasture intending to hobble it by the garage. He knew where he would find May. On the side porch. She would be in the hammock while Tex Allen, fascinator of the fair sex, would be sprawled lazily at her feet, or maybe squatted by her side.

Slim felt miserable as he visualized the latter. They wouldn't have played checkers long. May was not the type to waste a fine evening at an indoor sport as tame as checkers.

He was dismounting in the rear of the garage, but stopped suddenly as he heard voices from within. There was the metallic fumbling of engine parts. He heard Allen speak, then May. The cowboy's voice was the fainter. He was bent over the car's hood talking into the engine. Slim could tell by the peculiar intonations of his voice tones.

"The trouble with you gals," Slim heard

Allen say, "is yuh don't know your own mind. Sometimes somebody has to make it up for yuh. Now if this guy Slim who you say aims so hard to marry yuh would suddenly give yuh the air and start strummin' his guitar in somebody else's hammock you would darned soon find out just how he stood with yuh."

"Oh, I don't know." This from May accompanied with a sigh.

"Well, I do." Allen beat a tattoo on an engine part. "You're just like broncos. Gotta make a bronc' respect yuh 'fore you kin get anywhere with him. An' in order to make him do that yuh has to treat him wicked sometimes."

"Do you mean to insinuate that I could even like a man who presumed to treat me wicked," asked the young lady in frigid voice.

Allen: Tink, tink, tink. "Darn this plug. Like him, heavens no, yuh wouldn't like him. Yuh'd just love him to death. A little roughin' an' yuh'd be eatin' out of his hand."

"Why, that's perfectly ridiculous." The lady was astounded.

"It is, heh." Tink, tink—tink. "Wish he'd try it."

"So do I. I'd soon put him in his place."

Allen laughed. "I'll say you would. An' yuh know where that place'd be, don't yuh?" He answered himself. "Along by your side in front of a sad-faced parson, or a justice of the peace."

"I think you're horrid," said the girl.

"No-o-ooo-o, just sensible," drawled the cowboy. "I wasn't in the movies for nothin'. I learned a lotta things. I used to shy one time if a curl moved. Almost jump out o' my boots. But after I took the Hollywood cure I could umpire a ball game with Cleopatra whistlin' to me to come over an' play in her yard."

"Is that how they win them in Hollywood—bein' rough?" asked the girl.

"Oh, they have different rackets out there," drawled Allen. "The surest one is to walk on 'em a week then they're beggin' yuh to notice 'em."

"I don't believe it," said May with emphasis.

"Huh. Shoot yerself," said Shorty.

Further conversation was drowned as the garage was filled with the roar of the engine as it came suddenly to life. It was gradually throttled down to a steady hum.

"Hop in," Slim heard the cow-puncher yell.

He retreated from his pony as the Markins' flivver rolled out of the garage with Shorty at the steering wheel, a pretty girl at his side. A person standing in the darkness of the yard would not have known she was pretty. Slim, however, knew she was pretty, in fact, very pretty. And as he gazed in the darkness after the machine he had no difficulty whatever in visualizing the many features of her person which in his estimation made her not merely very pretty but positively the prettiest girl in the world.

"Huh," he said as he unhobbed his pony, "that guy Shorty knows a lot about gals." He mounted thoughtfully and sat so engrossed, he forgot to signal the little horse to move. They stood, a silhouette beneath a moonlit Texas sky, both as motionless as the famous Horse and Injun in "The End of the Trail," and quite as dejected.

"Now if a guy only could work that idea out," mused Slim. "But-t-t—huh! May's different. If I tried actin' like she didn't mean nothin' to me she might think I meant it and—well, what'n hells' bells are we standin' here for?"

He looked up, then prodded his horse. "Come on here, Tar Soap, what's the idear. We ain't goin' nowhere, but let's go."

II.

SLIM signed up with Shorty Allen to ride in his New York rodeo on the following day. He hadn't intended to, but circumstances arose overnight which made it seem imperative to do so. Endeavoring to coax sleep—marital thoughts keeping him awake—he suddenly sat upright in his bunk, so upright in fact, he bumped his head, as it occurred to him that *maybe Shorty would have another idea*, perhaps a less risky one *on how to win a lady*. If so, cultivation of Shorty would be fertile pastime. And such pastime would be quite feasible in a trip to New York.

He slept on it blissfully; awoke in the gray of the morning with ardor dampened and decided it didn't look so good. But cheered up considerable after the Chinese cook indulged in legerdemain with the kitchen stove and produced ham and eggs, baked spuds, hot muffins and sizzling coffee. The idea looked better after the third cup of coffee, still—

No, he didn't think he'd risk it. The rodeo, including the trip East, would have him away from Sunset Slope almost a month. No telling what might happen in that time. No, he better stick and let Nature take her course. If he was meant to win May he'd win her. If not, well, all the snares Shorty Allen might help him to lay for an unsuspecting little lady would be in vain.

He rode into town in the late afternoon to discover May Markins had left the Slope for an indefinite stay with her aunt in Larabee. And on the afternoon of the day before he had talked with her and she had made no mention of planning a visit anywhere. It was in the fever pitch of wrath at such a slight that he came upon Shorty Allen at the post office and promptly put his signature to a rodeo contract.

"We start right away," said the sawed-off cowboy, who had won fame through the West with his riding feats. "I only had my gang signed up three months ago but two of 'em had to back out at the last minute so that's how I come to be here pagin' yuh boys. Course yuh don't mind my callin' on yer gal while I was here. She an' me are old friends."

"My gal?" echoed Slim. "Shucks, I ain't got nothin' to say about who calls on May. Guess she likes to have 'bout everybody do that little thing but me."

"That ain't the way to rope 'em, partner," said Shorty sharply. "Yuh are on the wrong trail. Any time yuh set out to brand somethin' on hoofs yuh don't stop when the iron's hot do yuh?"

Slim shook his head.

"Then don't stop with a woman. She ain't no different than a head o' cattle 'less she's a little more obstinate. However if you'll excuse me I got an itchin' to line my stomach with some vittles. We grab the

mornin' Limited goin' East at Larabee tomorrow. I'll be at the depot with the outfit."

III.

ALL Larabee wasn't at the station to see Slim and the rest of Tex Allen's rodeo outfit, but the only part of Larabee Slim was interested in was very much there. About May Markins most of the outfit stood two deep as they waited for the train. She greeted Slim with the indifference which nettles a lover more than insults. She turned a shapely back upon him when he would claim her undivided attention and conversed upon uninteresting topics with others. Her aunt advised the boys what to glimpse in New York.

"Down at the water front," she said, "is hoss cars. Reg'lar dinky cars with a couple of poor lookin' things draggin' 'em what they calls hosses. Yuh boys be sure an' get a squint at them hoss cars, they's funnier than the cayuses haulin' 'em. Then there's the Aquarium, an' the Flatiron Building, an' don't forget Brooklyn Bridge, an' Central Park an' the subway an' the elevated. An' you want to see the ferry boats. Even got electric lights on 'em."

"Oh-h-h-h," sighed May, "I wish I were going. New York must be a fairyland."

"Why don't you come?"

There was a challenge in Slim's eyes as he bent forward and gazed boldly at her.

"That's the fiftieth," she said, blushing and lowering her eyes. "Monday you told me forty-nine would be the last."

Slim flushed, embarrassed. The train thundered into the station and his discomfiture was hidden in the hurried preparations for departure. Tex Allen stumbling up train steps with a mountain of baggage was collared by the editor of the *Larabee Blade*, a little man with steel rimmed spectacles. "Don't forget, Tex," he said. "Send me anything that's good. I'll pay the wire tolls an' be glad to get it. I'll sign yer name to it, too."

"You betcha," smiled the cowboy.

"Ride 'em, cowboy," was May Markins's parting message as the train pulled out and she waved her Stetson to the group yowling

from the observation platform. "Ride 'em, cowboy."

She stood shaking farewells, her aunt beside her. On the platform stood every member of the outfit excepting Slim. Angered for having ventured a fiftieth proposal and also because she had seen fit to refuse him the opportunity for an individual "good-by," he had slumped into a chair in the smoking car and allowed the others to yell their farewells.

Presently Shorty Allen slid into the seat beside him, craved a light for his homemade cigarette, then astounded the dejected Slim by announcing with enthusiasm:

"That's the way to do it."

"Do what?" cried Slim.

"What you just did," was the reply. "Give them a stiff neck lookin' for you and never be where they's lookin'. All the time she was wavin' and smilin' to everybody I could see her eyes rovin' all over the mob huntin' for yuh. Now she'll be wonderin' all the way home, 'Why wasn't Slim on the platform? He's always been just where I wanted him to be?'" Shorty whinnied like a perfect lady. "Now that yuh got her guessin', keep her guessin'."

Slim grunted.

"First thing yuh do when you hit New York," advised Shorty, "is have your picture taken on a postcard showin' yuh sittin' in front of six or seven bathin' gals, all peaches."

"What?" yelled Slim.

"Course the gals is a fake," explained Shorty. "Yuh just pose in one of those trick photo galleries in front of a screen. When the picture comes out yuh look like you was on the sand at Coney Island with these gals crowdin' to grab yuh. Mail her that and just write, 'Havin' a wonderful time.'"

"Like hell I will," said the horrified Slim.

"Foolish," drawled Shorty laconically. "I never knew that one to fail to get 'em. They's generally telegraphing yuh to come home five minutes after the postman leaves the card."

"I just couldn't do it," murmured Slim, mopping his brow. "I'm much obliged for

your interest, Shorty, and I sure did aim to pick up some hints from yuh on the way East, but I just couldn't deliberately deceive May or make her think I'd look at another gal."

"I see where you're plumb aimin' to lose her," scowled Shorty, "an' she's a mighty swell gal. What are you so powerful particular about how yuh win her so long as yuh get her. Love," philosophized the little cowboy, fingernailing ashes from his tailor-made cigarette, "ain't no different from politics. They's lots to it yuh like to forget. And there's lots to it nobody sees on the surface. The main thing is grabbin' the job or winnin' the lady. Whether yuh get to either through stink weeds or a flower plot don't matter after yuh get there."

"I guess maybe you're right," said Slim slowly digesting the other's Platonian discourse, "but everybody ain't cut out for playin' the game that way. Now, if I could win May by bluffin' a little I wouldn't mind. Say, bein' a hero or somethin'. Say," Slim sat up. "Why couldn't I be the star in the rodeo an' win her that way? Seein' you're goin' to write for the Larabee paper yuh could say that I sort of ran away with the show."

"That ain't a bad idea," said Shorty, getting up. "Shake. A damned good idea, I calls it."

They shook hands and Slim lighted up another cigarette and immediately focused rosy thoughts on May Markins. Shorty appraised him with a canny eye, then departed to indulge in a game of Red Dog.

IV.

NEW YORK!

A city of a million noises. A giant with a continual rattle in his throat. A living piece of organism with a million tiny gnats scurrying, crawling, pausing, loafing or lounging on its belching, breathing carcass. Here, a bell. There, a whistle. A torrent of humanity swirling into one hole in the ground and reappearing from another. Strings of cars on trembling steel trestles whirling through space. Like a child's playthings magnified. Automobiles spewing

from a thousand directions. Around corners, up streets, down streets, passing, re-passing, backing, skidding, moving—always moving, looking like a Christmas display in a toy department, wound up but never running down.

Sound of tin and steel and throb of metal. But sound, always sound. A vast thing, called a city, but resembling always a show window eternally trimmed. Full of puppets, hustling, bustling puppets. Some rich, some poor; some mean, some meaner. Some sad, some glad. Some strong, some weak. But all moving, moving, moving like leaves in an autumn gale. A dizzy, dizzy, dizzy whirl.

Into it stepped Caesar A. Watson, better known as Slim, and the rest of Tex Allen's rodeo outfit and immediately herded together like cattle in a snow storm, lest they be separated and whirled to destruction. For an hour they had watched the approach of this monster, the city. And each passing minute had carved away its slice of their confidence. Just as the last ounce of courage was oozing through their popped eyes and gaping mouths they were unceremoniously dumped into the monster's lap.

"I don't like it." This from Slim, whose teeth chattered.

"Oh, you'll get used to it," said Tex, casting an appreciative eye on modish young women who passed with curious glances at the group of cowmen.

"Never," rejoined Slim.

They moved from the railroad station to Madison Square Garden, a vast amphitheater occupying a city block, where the rodeo was to be held. The journey was through Fourth Avenue from Forty-Second Street to Twenty-Sixth. It was a journey of thought and prayer for Slim. He thought it was harrowing and he prayed he would safely emerge from it whole and alive. Never had Larabee and Sunset Slope seemed so far away. Never had May Markins looked so sweet and fair. And never had he realized before what a comfortable eating joint was the Slope's Greasy Spoon, until he viewed the strings of tiled restaurants so painfully clean, and so antiseptically uninviting. Entrance to the Garden gained, via a back door, he sniffed in welcome as

he recognized the familiar aroma of horses and steers, straw bedding and hay.

"I gets me a bed here and here's where I stay from now on," was Slim's assertion. "Yuh boys kin have your New York. I'll bed me down with my hoss and send out for my meals. When the rodeo's over with and we is all ready to hit the trail, Tex, yuh just lead me to the station and if yuh blindfold me I won't care a rap. Yes, suh, if any Brooklyn Bridges or electric Flat-iron buildings want to be looked at yuh'll have to bring 'em up here. I'll be in to New Yawk all week."

Sending a war whoop echoing through the building's vast cellar into which they had descended, Slim took a running dive into a mound of loose hay and buried himself with gusto.

He was true to his promise. He did not venture out of Madison Square Garden until the last day of the rodeo. Thousands of well laundered Easterners who hung about the exits of New York's great show house anxious for a close up of the long legged cowboy who bulldogged steers with such aggravating ease, and in whose hands a lariat became a graceful undulating, snake-like thing of beauty; and who sat on the buckingest outlaw horse as easy as a frog on a slimy log—these admirers were disappointed. Slim posed for no close-ups. He hankered for the roar of no L trains; ignored the lights of Broadway. At matinées he worked; evenings he worked. Between times he smoked and mooned. But on the last day he succumbed.

The matinée rodeo performance had been over ten minutes—when Slim slipped out of the Garden headed for West Street and the down town water front to prove to himself that, the Garden press agent, was a sober faced prevaricator in insisting for a full week running that such a thing existed as a steamship bigger than the huge Garden. It was five o'clock when Slim left the Garden, murmuring over and over the directions he was to take.

At five fifty o'clock an ambulance was racing through New York streets with his unconscious form.

At seven o'clock he returned to consciousness, to suffer such mortifications, he threat-

ened to set fire to hospital pillows with his flaming cheeks.

At seven twenty, Shorty Allen was at his bedside.

"What happened?" He knelt holding Slim's big hands in his own. The patient looked past his interrogator and focused a vacant stare on the wall.

"Don't ask me, please," he murmured in a shaking voice. "I can't tell you." He withdrew a hand and pressed it to his bandaged head.

"Can't tell me?" cried Shorty, astounded.

Slim shook his head.

"You don't mean, May didn't write and—and—and you tried to, to commit sui—"

"Do I look crazy?" asked the patient, endeavoring to sit up but dropping back with a groan.

"There, there," said Shorty, "I didn't mean that, but, well, New York drives some guys crazy, yuh know."

Slim sighed and covered his face with his hands.

"Well, if it wasn't that what was it?" persisted Shorty. "Somebody stick yuh up?"

"Nope."

"Fall off the Woolworth Building?"

"Nope, it wasn't that," said Slim.

Shorty gazed frantically about the room, then his eyes came to rest on a vase of roses. They were three days old a gift to a previous patient. He looked from the flowers to Slim's flushed face. A nurse entered. Shorty faced her abruptly.

"What's the matter with him?" he asked, and pointed to the bed.

"Don't you tell him," growled Slim.

Shorty winked. "What happened to him?" he coaxed. The nurse hesitated. Slim made violent signs to her.

Shorty winked again, then gazed down at a pocket from which there peeped coyly a five dollar bill.

"Why, all we know," replied the nurse, "is that he was kicked by a horse and trampled on."

Shorty gazed at Slim's red cheeks, then at the roses. Slim groaned. "There's been a lady here to see him?" he asked.

Slim looked amazed, then nodded violently to the nurse.

"Why, er, yes, I think there was. Thanks." She took the bill and passed out.

"So that's it," said Shorty Allen, facing the patient sternly. "Save a gal's life in a runaway, make a hero of yourself and then try to hide your light under a bushel. What was she, an heiress or an actress? But no matter, heiress I'll make it. That's a fine way to hold out on me after I've been telegraphing Larabee what a hero you've been at the show all week. Afraid May'll know about this, eh. Why, you big ham, this is the best advertising you could have. I wouldn't be surprised if she—but not matter. I'm on my way. It's almost show time. I'll be up right after it's over." He passed out leaving a speechless and thunderstruck sick man in his wake.

V.

SLIM was out of bed limping about five days later when the door to his room was suddenly pushed ajar and there stood May Markins, in her wake her aunt from Larabee.

"Slim." He heard his name, was then engulfed in two soft arms and kissed plumb on the mouth.

"Slim, I'm awfully sorry. Will you forgive me? I've been terribly mean to you and now you've well, you've turned out so wonderful, Slim."

"Me?"

"Oh, we know all about it," spoke up her aunt. She produced a clipping from a Larabee newspaper, stepped forward and presented it to Slim. He was amazed to see his photograph and a glowing account of how he had rescued an heiress in Central Park. She had, it seemed fallen in love with him on the spot, sent him flowers to the hospital and requested her father to take the cowboy into business with him.

Slim wanted to ask where Central Park was located, also other questions, but he desisted, realizing that to do so would be to betray that love schemer, Shorty Allen.

"It was awful big of you, Slim." May was talking.

"What was?" He looked up, surprised.

"To wire me to come after having such an experience. It seems to me if I had a

chance to marry a rich girl I wouldn't be sending away out to Texas for—"

"May," said Slim, posing a movie close-up with the young lady in his arms. He stopped helpless.

"I will," said the girl, "and right away too. I'm afraid, Slim dear, you've been runnin' wild in this here town."

Shorty Allen was best man two days later, Aunt Clara Markins bridesmaid. They were married in the Little Church Around the Corner from which they moved to Fifth Avenue.

"Here," said Shorty to Slim as he prepared to step with his bride on a motor bus to sightsee the great metropolis. He handed the slim groom an envelope. "Just a little gift for the hero," he said, winking at the bride.

"Does this go by Central Park?" May asked the conductor. It did.

Cuddled by her husband on top of the bus, a few minutes later May whispered shyly: I want you to show me where you saved her, you old hero!"

Slim blushed. To hide his embarrassment he slipped out the envelope Shorty had given him and opened it on the aisle side out of sight of his bride. He wondered if the little cowboy had given him a check for a wedding gift. They were approaching the Fifty-Ninth Street entrance to the park as Slim tore open the envelope. In it reposed a clipping from a New York newspaper. One glance and Slim blushed a fiery crimson, then tore it into bits and scattered them to the winds. It would never have done for Mrs. Cæsar A. Watson to have seen that clipping. On it was printed in blackface type:

COWBOY RUN OVER BY WEST STREET HORSE CAR.

Rodeo Hero, Bane of Steers, Mark for Decrepit Street Car Plugs. Goes to Hospital.

"Where was it you saved her, dear?" asked Mrs. Watson, tugging fondly at her husband's left arm, as the bus moved along by the park.

"Really, dear," said a harassed cowboy, "I wouldn't know the spot if I saw it."



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Good dealers charge One Dollar for the Topkis Men's Athletic Union Suit. All admit it's *worth* more.

Men's Shirts and Drawers, 75c per garment. 75c for Boys' Union Suits, Girls' Bloomer Union Suits, and Children's Waist Union Suits.

In Canada, Men's Union Suits, \$1.50.

Write today for free booklet "Comfort from Neck to Knee"

TOPKIS BROTHERS COMPANY, Wilmington, Delaware
General Sales Offices: 350 Broadway, New York City

Ask for TOPKIS Underwear.

Look for the Topkis label.



A SALE

of Genuine Hand
Beaded TUSSAH

SILK

Dresses

\$3.98

Yes, we mean it, the price is only \$3.98! Undoubtedly the biggest bargain sensation in years! A bewitchingly beautiful new style genuine Tussah Silk Dress, richly beaded and elegantly finished in every way. Most amazing offer ever made—don't miss it! Be quick! They will go fast!

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Richly made of fine quality genuine Tussah Silk, soft and shimmering—an ideal material. A striking feature is the elaborate beading—pretty bugle beads in rich color tones set in a most tasteful and elegant design. Self material narrow sack. Fashionable kimono length sleeves with slashed cuffs. Round neck; tailoring throughout is perfect, you will be delighted with the workmanship. The style is one piece, becoming to all ages and figures.

HURRY! Your order—no money now. Pay only on arrival special sale price \$3.98 and postage. If after try-on you don't think it the biggest bargain of your life, your money back.

COLORS—Navy Blue, Tan, Natural, Brown or Black. SIZES—Women's 32 to 46 bust; Misses' 14 to 22 years.

INTERNATIONAL MAIL ORDER CO.
Dept. D-2442 Chicago

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Fresh
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Guaranteed**

NEW-TREAD TIRES AT 40¢ ON THE DOLLAR

Send No Money!

Here is a real opportunity to cut your season's tire bill notwithstanding advances in prices. For a limited period only we offer our famous New-Tread Tires—as illustrated—at less than 40¢. Made of NEW LIVE RUBBER and built on the best carcasses money can buy.

Special Sale Prices

Size	Tire	Tube	Size	Tire	Tube
28x3	\$4.95	\$1.25	36x4	\$8.65	\$2.35
30x3	4.95	1.35	32x4 1/2	8.85	2.40
30x3 1/2	5.55	1.40	33x4 1/2	9.00	2.45
32x3 1/2	6.50	1.50	34x4 1/2	9.15	2.50
31x4	7.00	1.60	35x4 1/2	9.25	2.50
32x4	7.50	1.65	36x4 1/2	9.45	2.70
33x4	7.65	2.15	35x5	9.75	2.80
34x4	8.10	2.25	37x5	9.85	2.90

ALL OUR TIRES ARE NEW FRESH STOCK and Guaranteed for One Year. Shipment made same day order is received. Pay on arrival and if not satisfied, return AT OUR EXPENSE. Specify whether straight side or clincher wanted. **FIVE PER CENT DISCOUNT** when cash accompanies order. **DEALER AGENTS WANTED IN EVERY LOCALITY.**

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The clean, highly-refined oil for typewriters, sewing machines, radio equipment, bicycles, guns, etc. Lubricates, prevents rust. No color, stain or odor. Will not gum. Fine polish for piano cases, automobiles, etc. Buy Nyoil of your dealer or write **W. F. NYE, New Bedford, Mass.**



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YOUR SKIN CAN BE QUICKLY CLEARED of Pimples, Blackheads, Acne Eruptions on the face or body. Barbers Itch, Eczema, Enlarged Pores, Oily or Shiny Skin. **FREE** Write today for my FREE Booklet, "A CLEAR-TONE SKIN", telling how I cured myself after being afflicted for over fifteen years. \$1,000 Gold Cash prize to clear your skin of all above blemishes. **E. S. GIVENS, 113 Chemical Building, KANSAS CITY, MO.**

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Reduced Fac-Simile Gold Medal.

STUART'S PLAPAO-PADS are different from the truss, being medicine applicators made self-adhesive purposely to hold the distended muscles securely in place. No straps, buckles or springs attached—cannot slip, so cannot chafe or press against the pubic bone. Thousands have successfully treated themselves at home without hindrance from work—most obstinate cases conquered.



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Soft as velvet—easy to apply—inexpensive. Awarded Gold Medal and Grand Prix. Process of recovery is natural, so afterwards no further use for trusses. We prove it by sending Trial of Plapao absolutely **FREE**. Write name on Coupon and send TODAY. **Plapao Co., 633 Stuart Bldg., St. Louis, Mo.**

Name.....
Address.....
Return mail will bring Free Trial Plapao.....

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Over 2,000 illustrations of Diamond-set Jewelry, Watches, Pearls, Mesh Bags, Silverware, etc. Sent prepaid for your Free Examination. **CREDIT TERMS** on all articles: One-tenth down, balance divided into equal payments within 8 months.



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\$75 Dazaling, Blue White Diamond, Solid 18 K White Gold. Delivered on payment of \$7.50, then **\$1.75 A WEEK**

Wedding Rings



All Platinum, \$25 up. With Diamonds: Three Diamonds, \$65; five Diamonds, \$80; seven Diamonds, \$95; nine Diamonds, \$110. Solid White or Green Gold Wedding Rings, \$5.00 up.

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DEPT. N-139

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Stores in Leading Cities



18-K White Gold, 17 Jewels, \$29.75
14-K White Gold, 15 Jewels, \$24.85

The Muscle Builder

Show me the man who doesn't want muscle, with abounding health, and I'll show you a man who is ready to be measured for a wooden box—he's dead and he doesn't know it. A body without muscle is like a house without foundation—a little storm, and over it goes.

Get wise, fellows, I shouldn't have to tell you these things. You can't enjoy life with a weak, sickly body. There is no pleasure like the feeling of health and strength. And when I say strength, I don't mean any half-way business. Do it right, or forget it.

The Whole Works

I build muscle—good, big solid muscle. Let other fellows knock this idea if they want. I know what I'm doing and I guarantee *you'll like it*. I'll put an arm on you that can be made pliable one second and bulge out hard as steel the next. An arm that will be equally useful in weight lifting and any kind of skilful athletics. Just for a starter, I'll increase the size of that arm at least one full inch in the first 30 days. I'll put a chest on you to be proud of. A full, deep chest with a pair of lungs that will take a man-sized load of rich oxygen with every breath, and you know what that means. Your lungs feed your blood, shooting a kick through your veins that will make you just bubble over with vitality. I will build up those inner muscles around your heart and every vital organ. I will send a thrill up your old spinal column that will make you feel like tackling a wildcat.



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America's Leading Authority on Physical Education

A New Body in 90 Days

Some wise crackers say it takes years to put a man in shape. That's because they don't know any better. I want just 90 days and I'll change your body so you won't recognize yourself. By that time every muscle in your anatomy will literally bulge out. And what's more your whole being will just tingle with excitement. You will have a spring to your step and a flash to your eye that will radiate personality wherever you go. You will feel like shouting: "I'm a man—and I can prove it."

Come on now, fellows! Why waste more time? I'm not just promising these things. I guarantee them. If you doubt me, make me prove it. Are you ready? Let's go!

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It is Free

It contains forty-three full-page photographs of myself and some of the many prize-winning pupils I have trained. Some of these came to me as pitiful weaklings, imploring me to help them. Look them over now and you will marvel at their present physiques. This book will prove an impetus and a real inspiration to you. It will thrill you through and through. All I ask is 10 cents to cover the cost of wrapping and mailing and it is yours to keep. This will not obligate you at all, but for the sake of your future health and happiness, do not put it off. Send today—right now, before you turn this page.

EARLE E. LIEDERMAN

Dept. 5005, 305 Broadway, New York City

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Dept. 5005, 305 Broadway, New York City

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Street.....

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10 Shaves
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See Coupon

We Tried 130 Times Before we perfected a Shaving Cream like this

By V. K. Cassidy, Chief Chemist
GENTLEMEN:

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We studied all shaving soaps made.

We interviewed 1,000 typical men to learn their desires in a shaving cream.

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Users by the millions were surprised when they asked for our ten-shave test. The demand for this cream became a business sensation.

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To add the final touch to shaving luxury, we have created Palmolive After Shaving Talc—especially for men. Doesn't show. Leaves the skin smooth and fresh, and gives that well-groomed look. Try the sample we are sending free with the tube of Shaving Cream.

There are new delights here for every man who shaves. Please let us prove them to you. Clip coupon now.

PALMOLIVE SHAVING CREAM

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10 SHAVES FREE

and a Can of Palmolive After Shaving Talc

Simply insert your name and address and mail to

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50¢

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ACCEPT NO SUBSTITUTES
Be sure you get the genuine. Will not curl, roll or wrinkle. Imitations lack the patented feature.

LOOK FOR THE NAME SPUR ON THE TIE

Write for Style Book C

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Suspenders and Garters, guaranteed 365 days; Bull-Dog Belts and Vestoff Suspenders

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Get this, men—

A complete assortment of the world's finest smoking tobaccos — sent to any smoker anywhere — *on 10 days approval*

A new idea for Pipe-Smokers: 12 famous tobaccos, packed in a handsome Humidor—shipped to you direct to help you find the soul-mate for your pipe.

GUARANTEED BY

The American Tobacco Co

MOST men have written their John Hancocks on a lot of "dotted lines." But, if you're a pipe-smoker, we'll wager that you've never signed a fairer, sweeter contract than the little coupon at the bottom of this page.

Just a few strokes of your pen—and you can end your quest of years for a perfect smoking tobacco.

But we are getting ahead of our story.

The average pipe-smoker is the greatest little experimenter in the world. He's forever trying a "new one," confident that some day he'll find the real affinity for his pipe.

So we created the *Humidor Sampler* to meet his needs.

Into a bright red lacquered humidor case, we have packed an assortment of twelve famous smoking tobaccos—covering the whole range of smoking tobacco taste.

There are myriads of different brands of smoking tobaccos on the market. But of them all, there are 12 distinctive blends which, in our opinion, stand in a class by

themselves for superlative flavor, aroma and quality.

These twelve decisive blends—the twelve "primary colors" of tobaccos—have been selected for the *Humidor Sampler*. When you have tried these twelve, you have tried the best; if your tobacco-ideal is to be found anywhere, it must be one of these "Twelve Best."

Ten-Day Approval Offer

We are eager to send the *Humidor* assortment to any smoker, anywhere, on ten days' approval.

Send no money. Just sign and mail the coupon. That will bring you the *Humidor* assortment direct from our factories to your den. When the postman brings the package, deposit \$1.50 with him, plus postage.

If a ten-day try-out of these tobaccos doesn't give you more real pipe pleasure than you've ever had before, simply return the *Humidor*, and you'll get your \$1.50 and the postage back *prompto*—and pleasantly.

Send No Money—Just Mail Coupon

A Test of the 12 Best for only \$1.50

If you were to try all 12 of these tobaccos in full size packages, the cost would be:

Blue Bear . . .	.25
Captain . . .	.30
Imperial Cube Cut . . .	.30
Herbert Tareyton . . .	.25
Old English Curve Cut . . .	.15
The Garrick . . .	.30
Carlton Club . . .	.15
Yale Mixture . . .	.25
Funk's Select Mixture . . .	.15
Three States . . .	.25
Willie Latakia . . .	.45
Louisiana Perique . . .	.25

Total . . . \$3.05

But through the *Humidor Sampler* you get a liberal "get acquainted" quantity of each for \$1.50

**The American Tobacco Co., Inc., Marburg Branch
Dept. 104, Baltimore, Md.**

Please send me, on 10 days' approval, one of your *Humidor Samplers* of twelve different smoking tobaccos. I will pay postman \$1.50 (plus postage) on receipt—with the understanding that if I am not satisfied I may return *Humidor* in 10 days and you agree to refund \$1.50 and postage by return mail.

Name.....

Address.....

City..... State.....

Note:—If you expect to be out when postman calls you may enclose \$1.50 with coupon and *Humidor* will be sent to you postpaid.

100
cigarettes
for 15¢

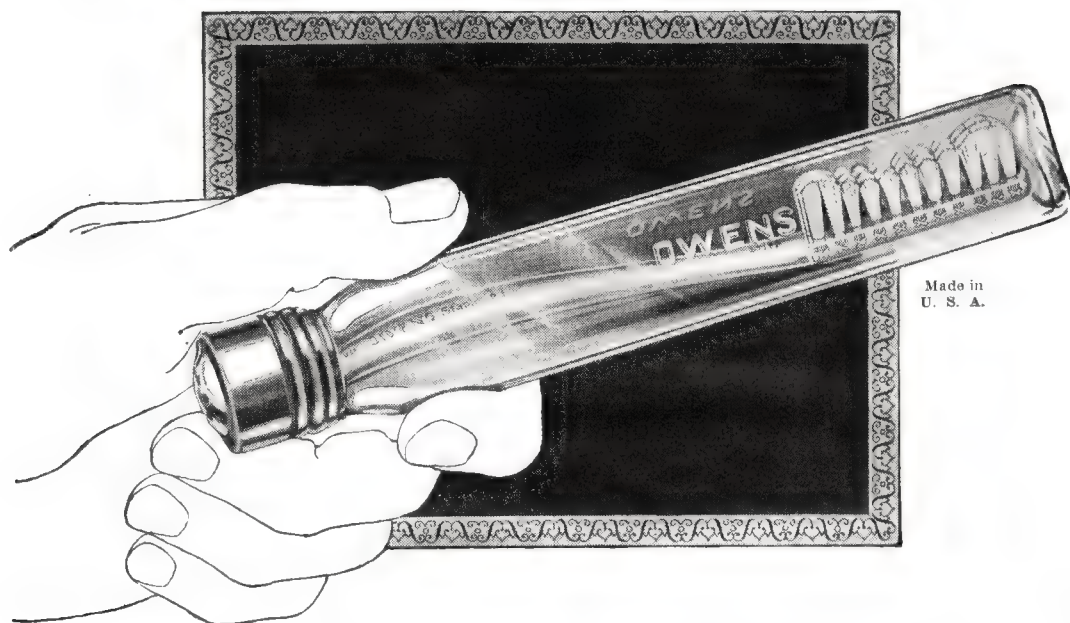
GENUINE
BULL DURHAM

Settle the cigarette question
by rolling your own from
BULL. You get more
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more enjoyment — and much
more for your money—

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Protection when you buy— convenience when you travel

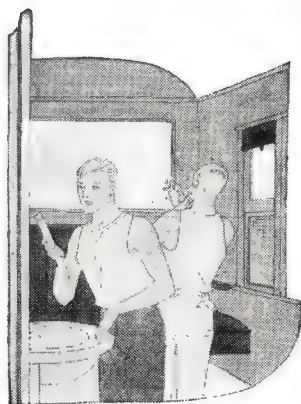
EVERY Owens Staple-tied Tooth Brush is sold in a strong, clean, transparent glass container. It protects your Owens from careless thumbing and handling in the druggist's store. It also makes a wonderfully convenient, sanitary container for traveling.

You'll prefer using this clean tooth brush! Many dentists have declared it to be the finest ever designed for the correct care of the teeth! The trim is shaped to clean every part of your teeth thoroughly. Bristle tufts are wide-spaced and wedge-shaped to reach every

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Each bristle tuft is permanently tied into the handle by a hidden staple. Handles are in six distinctive colors—one for you personally.

No other tooth brush can bring you all these advantages! Yet the Owens—in the glass container—costs you no more than ordinary tooth brushes. 30, 40 and 50 cents each, in child's, youth's and adult's sizes. See it at your druggist's.



OWENS

Staple-tied TOOTH BRUSH

THE OWENS BOTTLE COMPANY, TOLEDO



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**Don't pay Pyorrhea's price—
brush your teeth with Forhan's**

Every man and woman is in danger of Pyorrhea. According to reliable dental statistics, four persons out of every five past forty, and thousands younger, too, are victims.

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it checks Pyorrhea

Formula of
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IF YOU CAN TELL IT FROM A GENUINE DIAMOND SEND IT BACK
These Amazing Beautiful COROLITE Gems match the scintillating beauty of GENUINE DIAMONDS in every way. They have the same gorgeous blazing flash and dazzling play of living rainbow fire. Standing the terrific Acid Test of direct comparison. Life time experts need all their experience to see any difference. Prove this yourself.

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No. 1 Ladies Solitaire 14K Gold Filled Ring - \$2.84
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No. 3 Ladies Hand Carved Basket Ring, Platinum effect - \$3.96
No. 4 Ladies Bridal Blossom Engraved Solitaire - \$3.34
No. 5 Mens Heavy Belcher 14K Gold Filled Ring - \$3.68
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Carat Size Gems. Beautiful Hand Carved and Engraved. Mountings of most modern design bearing an unqualified 20 year guarantee. Art Leather, Silk and Velvet Lined Gift Case Free with each ring.

SEND NO MONEY Keep your money right at home. Just send name, address and number of ring wanted and size as shown by slip of paper fitting end to end around finger joint and your ring will come by return mail. Deposit amount shown above with postage. You do not risk a penny as our binding legal guarantee to refund your money in full is attached to every ring we sell. **SEND TODAY.**

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FREE**

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Write for
our offer

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**Don't Hide Them With a Veil; Remove
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This preparation for the treatment of freckles is so successful in removing freckles and giving a clear, beautiful complexion that it is sold under guarantee to refund the money if it fails.

Don't hide your freckles under a veil; get an ounce of Othine and remove them. Even the first few applications should show a wonderful improvement, some of the lighter freckles vanishing entirely.

Be sure to ask the druggist for the double-strength Othine: it is this that is sold on the money-back guarantee.

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An automobile goes 27 miles on air by using an automatic device which was installed in less than 5 minutes. The automobile was only making 30 miles on a gallon of gasoline, but after this remarkable invention was installed it made better than 57. The inventor, Mr. J. A. Stransky, 622 Eleventh Street, Pukwana, South Dakota, wants agents and is willing to send a sample at his own risk. Write him today.



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means calm
and steady
of nerve—
athletes find
the use of
Beeman's

*"a sensible
habit"*



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Conns give you **FREE**
most pleasure and quickest
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*in tone—perfect in scale—hand-
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Have Good Hair
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Rich
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Without question the style hit of the season! Taking country by storm! Clever new Parisian style Suit Dress, so designed that coat can easily be detached and skirt worn separately. The price is almost unbelievable, but we mean it! For a short time only is this offer made to bring us a host of new friends. Get your order onto the first Chicago train.

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Fashioned from the famous Longwear Gabardine weave Serge, of good cotton yarns, always looks beautiful and wears splendidly. Elaborately embellished with finest artistically arranged silk and gold colored braid. This elegant braiding extends clear around bottom of coat and cuffs and also on vestee. Charming silky Venetian collar with decorative end tips. Wonderfully tailored throughout—your friends will think you paid several times this sale price.

Send name, size and color—no money now. Pay only on arrival \$3.98 and postage. After try on, if you don't think it the best buy of your lifetime, your money comes back quick and without question.

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GREAT PRICE SAVING Direct to you from the largest typewriter factory in the world by our money saving methods.

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City..... State.....

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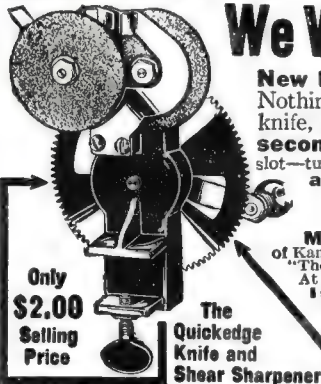
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YOU know, of course, that Listerine has dozens of uses as a safe antiseptic. But do you know of its unusual properties as a safe non-irritating deodorant?

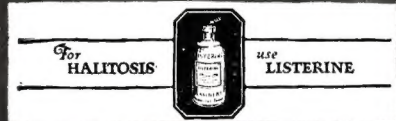
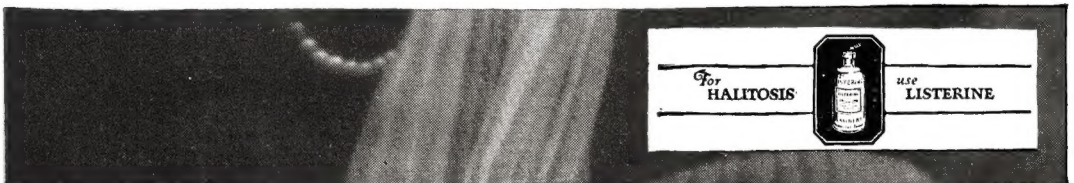
Whenever you don't have time for a tub or shower, or when these are not accessible, simply try dousing on Listerine. See how cool, refreshed and clean it leaves you feeling.

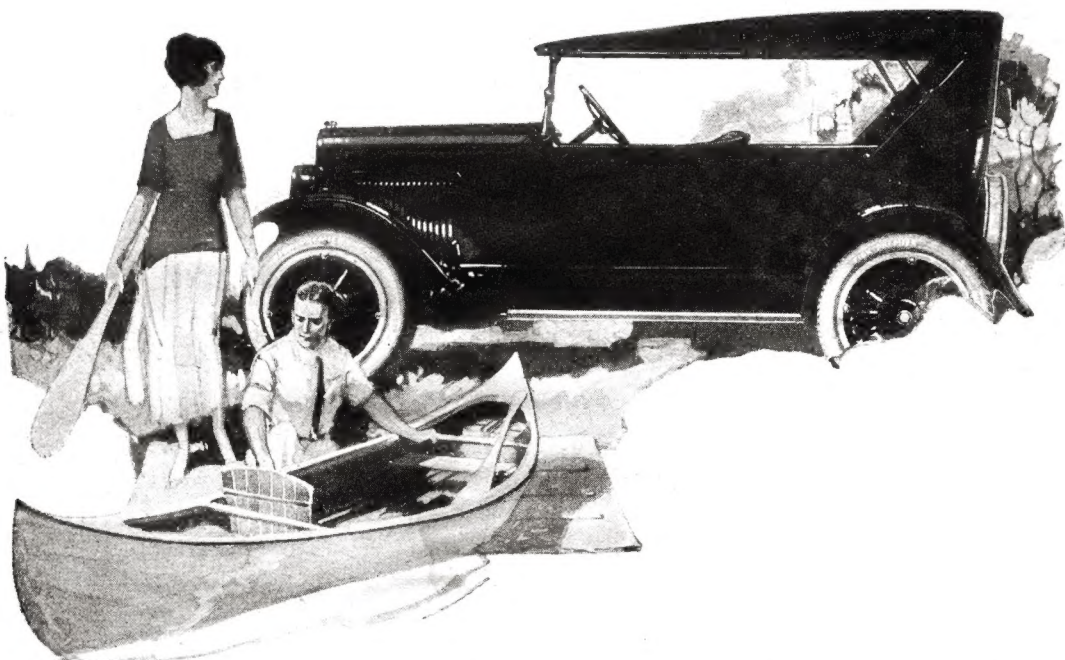
And best of all, Listerine used this way as a deodorant cannot irritate or injure the most delicate skin. Rather, it is soothing, healing, evaporates quickly, and cannot stain garments.

It is the ideal deodorant.

Try Listerine this way some afternoon when you feel hot and sticky after a game of tennis; or some day when you have just finished a hot afternoon's shopping; or when you are on a motor trip and it's miles between tubs; or when you are traveling and you miss the old shower way back home.

You will be delighted with the refreshing, exhilarating effect and you will pass this suggestion along to your friends.—*Lambert Pharmaceutical Company, Saint Louis, U. S. A.*





Live on the Sunny Side of Life

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Overland has swept aside the old notion that you have to spend a lot of money for a quality automobile. In Overland you get big-car power and big-car comfort—and all the easy-handling and low-upkeep advantages of a light car. Hundreds

of two-car families leave their heavy, cumbersome car stand in the garage most of the time while they drive around and enjoy themselves in an Overland.

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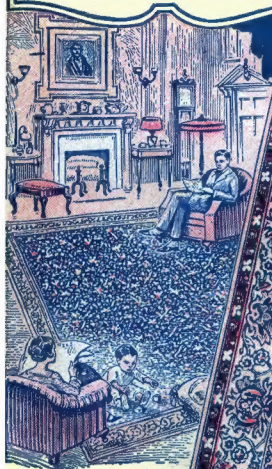
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The maker guarantees these rugs free from manufacturing defects, and Hartman guarantees them to be exactly as represented.

If not entirely satisfied after 30 days' free trial, return the rug and your money will be refunded.

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No C. O. D.—Nothing to Pay for Rug on Arrival

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9x12 Ft. Neponset Rug Seamless and Genuine Waterproof

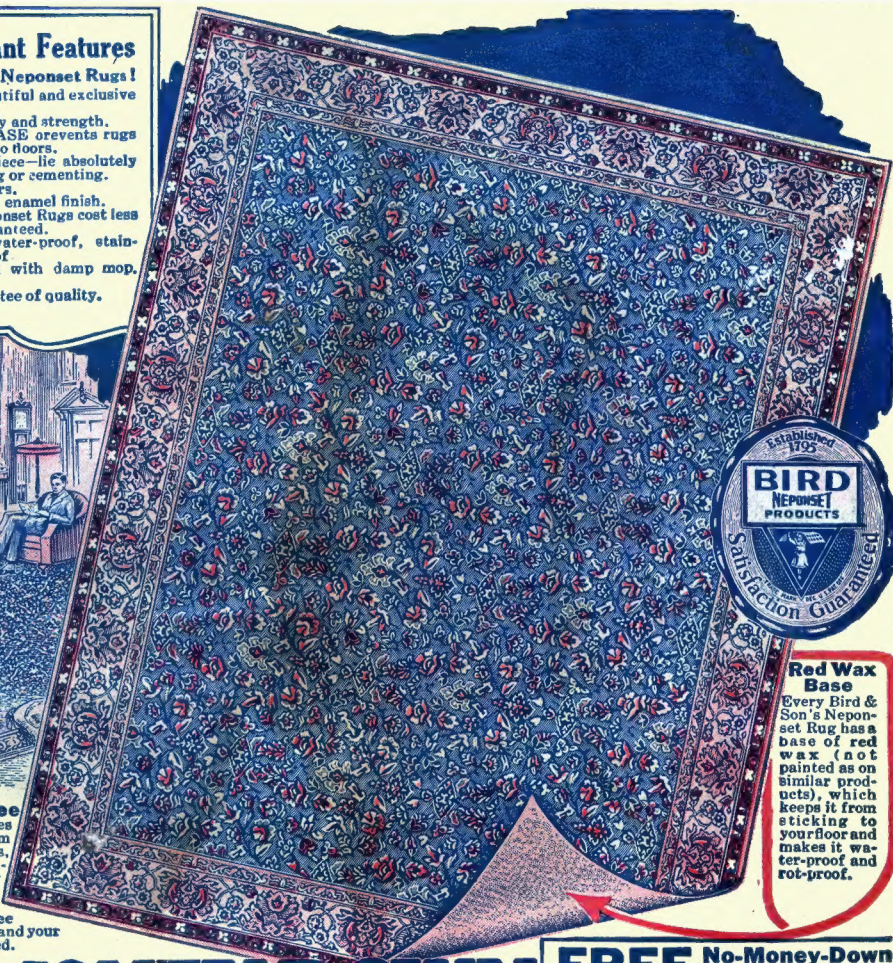
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Order No. 34FMA35. Bargain Price, \$16.85. No Money Down. Pay \$2 Monthly.

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